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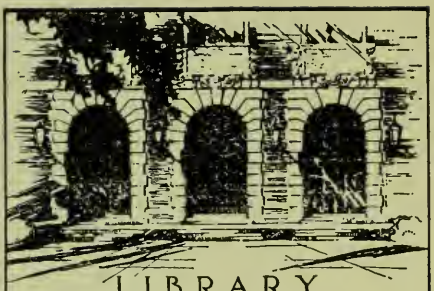

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THE MAN WITH A SHADOW

BY

G. MANVILLE FENN,

AUTHOR OF "ONE MAID'S MISCHIEF," "THE MASTER OF THE CEREMONIES." "DOUBLE CUNNING," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
WARD AND DOWNEY,
12, YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN, W.C.
1888.

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CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,
CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.

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THE MAN WITH A SHADOW.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST BARONET'S TOMB.

As Horace North battled with his thoughts, Moredock chuckled and went on :

"They drinks it, doctor, the idiots, and all the time they say it's horrid to eat a bit o' churchyard mutton. Squire Luke didn't care, though. He wouldn't have said no to a bit o' mutton 'cause it was pastured in the churchyard. But he has to send they sheep right t'other side o' the county to sell 'em. Folks 'bout here wouldn't touch a bit o' churchyard mutton. Such stuff! Keeps the graves nibbled off clean and neat. Don't hurt they. Mutton's sweet enough, and so they goes on

drinking the water all round the yard, as is piled up with dead folk as I've buried, and my father and grandfather before me. Ay, they drinks the water, but wouldn't touch the mutton ; they'd rather starve. Damp churchyard ; and squire'll lay snug on his dry shelf, and me—some day—in the cold, wet ground."

"It all comes to the same thing, Moredock," said the doctor, rousing himself.

"May be, doctor: may be as you're right," said the old man, shaking his head solemnly—"'Ashes to ashes, dust to dust ;' but there's a deal o' differ, and it takes a deal longer to come to that. I say, doctor, 'member what I said to you 'bout squire drinking himself to death ?" said the old man, stooping to pick up a crowbar that he had let fall a few minutes before.

"Yes," said North, gazing thoughtfully at the old man, and hardly realising what he said.

"More strange things happen than what I told you. I knowed it wouldn't be long before he drank himself to death."

"The squire died from an accident, Moredock," said the doctor sternly.

"Ay, but what made the accident?" said the old man, with a chuckle. "Was it steps, was it bottles, was it corks? Nay, it were something inside the bottle. Drop o' brandy's good, but when you gets too much, it's poison."

The doctor did not speak, only stood just inside the chancel door, gazing fixedly at the old man, with his thoughts wandering from the mausoleum built by the vestry, to the squire's remains lying up at the Hall, and his strange schemes, by which humanity might, perhaps, be spared much pain and care.

"I've took the last o' that there physic, doctor."

"Perhaps be of incalculable benefit to coming generations," mused the doctor, as he went on dreaming, standing there with one hand resting on the tomb-rail, and seeming to look through the present in the shape of the crabbed and gnarled old sexton to a future where all was health and strength.

"It was rare stuff, doctor," continued old

Moredock, with a chuckle, as he glanced sidewise at the dreaming man. "Mussy me! a drop o' that allus seemed to make my toes tingle, and it went right up into the roots of my hair."

"Why not—why not try?" It seemed a great experiment, but how little as compared with what had been done of old! "Why not —why not try?"

"You'll let me have another bottle, doctor. It does me a sight of good."

"I must. It seems like fate urging me on. It is for her—to do something to distinguish myself. Here is the opportunity, and I hesitate."

"One day I took a dose, doctor, and I thought it was trubble nasty, but five minutes after I said to myself, this beats brandy from the inn. They sperrets don't make your fingers go cricking and your toes tingle. Rare stuff, doctor. What's he gone to sleep?"

"Yes, I will do it; but how? No; it is impossible."

"You'll let me have another bottle o' that there physic, doctor, won't yer?"

"Physic, Moredock? Physic?" said the doctor, starting. "You don't require more now."

"Ah! but I do. See what a lot o' good last lot did me. I'm a deal stronger than I used to were. You'll let me have another bottle, doctor?"

"Well, well, I'll see. Terrible job this, Moredock."

"Ay, it be trubble job, doctor. I'm going to open the morslem. Say, doctor, 'member what I said 'bout my Dally. Be strange thing if she got to be missus up at Hall now. Why, he be dreaming like again," he added to himself.

"Remember what?" said the doctor. "Your Dally—the Rectory maid?"

"Ay, doctor; seems as if them as is maids may be missuses. Who knows, eh?"

"Who knows, you old wretch!" cried the doctor angrily. "You look sharply after your grandchild, for fear trouble should come."

"All right, doctor, I will. I'll look out, and I'm not going to quarrel with you. I

arn't forgot what you did when I cut my hand with the spade."

"And suffered from blood poisoning, eh? Ah! I saved your life then, Moredock."

"And you will again, won't you, doctor?" said the old man smoothly; "for I've a deal to do yet. Don't be jealous, doctor. If my gal gets to be my lady you shall 'tend her. You're a clever one, doctor; but there, I must go on, for I've a deal to do."

The old man gave the doctor a ghoul-like smile, and went off to busy himself, doing nothing apparently, though he was busier than might have been supposed; while, as if unable to tear himself away, Horace North stood holding on to the railing of the tomb in the chancel—the tomb where the founder of the family lay—the next in descent of the line of baronets having preferred to build the noble mausoleum on the opposite side, where it looked like a handsome chapel of the fine old ecclesiastical structure; and it would be there that the last dead baronet would in a few days lie.

North gazed straight before him, as he

held on by that metal rail of the Candlish tomb, with a dark plunge before him, and beyond that, after battling with the waters of discovery, a wonderland opening out, wherein he was about to explore, to find fame and win the woman he told himself he loved, and who, he believed, loved him as dearly in return. And yet all the while, as, from time to time, Moredock looked in with a smile, after pottering about the entrance to the mausoleum, whose keys he held, the doctor seemed to be staring at the Candlish tomb, which took up so much of the chancel, just as its occupant had taken up space when he was alive.

It was a curious structure, that tomb, curious as the railings which the doctor held. The edifice resembled nothing so much as an ornamental, extremely cramped, four-post bedstead, built in marble, with the palisade to keep the vulgar from coming too close to the stony effigy of the great Sir Wyckeley Candlish, Baronet, of the days of good King James; the more especially that, in company with his wife, Dame

Candlish, he had apparently gone to bed with all his clothes on. He had been, unless the sculptor's chisel had lied, a man like a bull-headed butcher who had married a cook, and she was represented in her puffs and furbelows, and he in his stuffed breeches and rosetted shoes, feathered cap, and short cape. His feet had the appearance of ornaments, not members for use; and his lady's hands, joined in prayer, were like small gloves, as they lay there side by side. A pair of ornaments upon which their posterity might gaze what time they came to read the eulogy in Latin carved in a panel of the stone bedstead, with arms and escutcheons, and mottoes and puffs that were not true, after the fashion of the time.

It was a curious specimen of old-world vanity, so large that it seemed as if it were the principal object of the place—an idol altar, with its gods, about which the chancel had been built for protection.

"What trash!" exclaimed North, when he suddenly seemed to awaken to the object at which he gazed, "as if a Candlish was ever

of any value in this world—ever did one good or virtuous act.

"Any good in this world? Why not at last. Everything seems to point to it. Even the worst of the race might do some good. I'll hesitate no longer. He can't refuse me."

"Doctor! Been asleep?"

"Asleep, man? No. Never more thoroughly awake."

"I asked you to let me have another bottle of that—the tingling stuff. It done me a mort o' good."

"Yes, yes," said North huskily. "You shall have some more, old man!"

"Ay; that's right," said the old fellow, giving his hands a rub. "Couldn't tell me what it is, could you, so as I might get some of it myself without troubling you?"

"What is it? One of my secrets, Moredock, just as you have yours. Trust me, and you shall have as much as is for your good."

"Hah! that's right, doctor; that's right," chuckled the old fellow horribly. "I mean to live a long time yet, and may as well do it comfortably. I'll come round to your surgery

to-night, and—hist!" he whispered; "is there anything I can bring?"

"No—no," said the doctor hastily; "but, Moredock, I do want you to do something for me."

"Eh? I do something for you, doctor? It isn't money, is it?"

"Money, man? No; I'll tell you what I want."

"Hist! parson!" said the old man, giving him a nudge, as a familiar step was heard upon the gravel path of the churchyard; and, directly after, the tall figure of the curate darkened the door.

"Ah! North; you here? Having a look round?"

"Yes," said the doctor; "and a chat with my old patient."

"Ah!" said the curate, shaking his head at the sexton.

"Doctor's going to let me have another bottle of the stuff as I told you 'bout, sir."

"Indeed!" said Salis, rather gruffly. "I wish you could do without so many bottles of stuff, Moredock. But, there, I wanted to see you about the preparations."

"Don't you trouble yourself about that, sir," grumbled the old fellow. "It ain't the first time a Candlish has died, and I've put things ready. That'll be all right, sir. That's my business. You shan't have no cause to complain."

"Be a little extra particular about the church and the yard, Moredock; and, above all, have those sheep out. Mr. May writes me word that he shall come down from town on purpose to read the service over Sir Luke, and he hates to see sheep in the churchyard."

"'Member what I said, doctor?" chuckled the old man. "But what am I to do, sir? Churchwarden Sir Luke had 'em put there; who's to order 'em to be took away?"

"I will!" said the curate sharply. "There, that will do."

Moredock trudged away.

"I'm afraid I have a morbid antipathy to that old man," said the curate.

"Ah, he's a character."

"Yes, and a bad one, too: I'm glad we have his grandchild away from him."

"So am I, and if I were you, Salis, I'd keep a sharp look-out on the girl."

"Yes, of course!" said the curate impatiently. "But you heard what I said about May coming down?"

"Yes; but what does that matter?"

"Only a long series of lectures to me, which makes my blood boil. I've had another unpleasantry, too. I went up to the Hall to see—Sir Thomas—I suppose I must call him now, and he sent me out an insolent message; at least, I thought it so."

"Never mind, old fellow; we all have our troubles."

"Not going to trouble," said the curate quietly. "Coming my way?"

"No. I want another word with Moredock, and then I'm going home."

"Ah, he's a queer old fellow," said the curate, glancing towards the sexton as he went round the chancel with a crowbar over his shoulder, the old man turning to give both a cunning, magpie-like look, as he went out of sight.

The two friends parted, and then North followed the sexton.

"I don't like it," he muttered. "Salis

would be horrified; he would never forgive me; and yet to win the sister's, I am risking the brother's love. Oh, but it is more than that," he said excitedly; "far more than that. It is in the service of science and of humanity at large. I can't help it. I must —I will!"

There was tremendous emphasis on that "I will!" and, as if now fully resolved, he went to where the old sexton was scraping and chopping about the entrance of the mausoleum, and sometimes stooping to drag out a luxuriant weed.

"Ah, doctor," he said; "back again? Parson's a bit hard on me. I hope he hasn't been running me down."

"Nonsense! No. Look here, Moredock, you have always expressed a desire to serve me?"

"Yes, doctor; of course."

"Then, look here," said North, bending down towards the old man. "I want you to——"

He finished his speech in a low voice by the old man's ear.

"You want what?" was the reply.

The doctor whispered to him again more earnestly than before.

The old man let the crowbar fall to his side, his jaw dropped, and he stood in a stooping position, staring.

"You want me to do that, doctor?" he whispered, with a tremble in his voice.

"Yes, I want your help in this."

"No, no, doctor; I couldn't indeed!"

"You could, Moredock; and you will!"

The old man shivered.

"I've done a deal," he whispered; "and I've seen a deal; but oh, doctor! don't ask me to do this."

"I don't ask you," said the doctor sternly. "I only say you must—you shall!"

CHAPTER II.

"A FINE BERRIN'."

Boom!

The big tenor bell made the louvres rattle in the tower windows, as it sent forth its sonorous note to announce far and wide that the Candlish mausoleum was open and ready to receive the remains of the last owner of the title conferred by King James.

Boom! again: so heavy and deep a sound that it seemed to strike the cottage windows and rebound like a wave, to go quivering off upon the wind and collect the people from far and near.

It was early yet, but one little trim-looking body was astir, in the person of Dally Watlock, who stole out of the back door at the Rectory,

made her way into the meadows, hurried down to the river, and along behind the Manor House, and so reached the churchyard at the back, where the vestry door in the north-east corner was easily accessible.

Dally walked and ran, looking sharply from side to side to see if she were noticed, gave a quick glance at the steps leading down to the mausoleum, and longed to peep in, but refrained, and darted in at the vestry door.

She knew the vestry would be empty, for she had left the curate at home, and she had heard that the Reverend Maurice May would not be over for nearly an hour, so there was an excellent chance for her to obtain the seat she wished, and see the funeral, and to that end she had come.

"How tiresome!" she cried, giving the oaken door in the corner of the vestry an angry thump. "Locked!"

Boom! went the big bell.

"And gran'fa's got the key," she cried. "I'll make him give it to me."

Dally looked a good deal like a big black rabbit turned by a fairy into a girl, as she

darted out of the vestry, and dodged in and out among the tombstones and old vaults on her way round to the big west door in the tower, from which came another loud boom to fly quivering away upon the air.

The big door was ajar, and yielded readily to her touch as she thrust, and the next minute she had entered, and pushed it to, to stand facing old Moredock, as he dragged away at the rope and brought forth from the big tenor another heavy boom.

The old man was in his shirt-sleeves, and his coat hung up behind the door, with his cap above it, so that it bore a strong resemblance to the old sexton, who had apparently been bringing his existence to an end by means of a piece of rope belonging to a bell.

"Hallo, Dally!" said the old man, giving her one of his ghoulish grins, as if proud of the yellow tooth still left; "what have you come for?"

"I want to see squire's funeral, gran'fa. To get a good place."

"Ah, I know'd you'd come," said the old

man. "I say, Dally; Sir Tom Candlish, eh? Have you tried how it sounds?"

"What nonsense, gran'fa! and do a-done. You'll have some one hear you."

"He—he—he! Let 'em," chuckled the old man; "let 'em. Sir Thomas Candlish, eh?"

"I don't know what you mean," said the girl, giving her head a vain toss.

Boom! went the bell, after the rope had rattled; and the old man groaned with the effort.

"He—he—he! No, no, you don't know,' he chuckled, moving sidewise, and giving the girl a sharp nudge with his elbow. "But, my word, Dally, you do look pretty this morning."

"Don't, gran'fa. What stuff!"

"Oh, but you do," said the old man, looking at her critically; "and fine and smart too for coming to a funeral."

"Why, you wouldn't have had me wear black, gran'fa, would you?"

They were quite alone in the belfry, and as the old man talked, he from time to time

gave a steady pull at the rope, and a heavy, jarring *boom* was the result.

"Ah, and I might have said wear black, if I'd ha' thought of it," said the old man, examining the girl from top to toe.

"Then I hadn't got any black, and if I had I would not have worn it, because it makes one look so ugly," said the girl, giving her head another toss. "Now do tell me where to go. I want to see well. Can't you put me up in that loft place over the vestry?"

"What! where you could see down into squire's pew?" said the old man, giving another tug at the rope.

"Yes, gran'fa; it's a nice snug place, where no one could see me."

"Oh, yes, they could," said the old man, chuckling. "Anybody looked up from the squire's pew he could see your bonny face."

"I'm sure I didn't know," said the girl; "and you're very fond of calling it a bonny face all at once. You said one day I was an ugly little witch."

"Did I?" said the old man, whose voice

was nearly drowned by the boom he produced from the bell. "I s'pose I was cross that day. But, Dally, why didn't you come and ask your old grandfather for some money to buy black?"

"Because he'd have called me an idle hussy, and told me to go about my business," said the girl pertly.

"No, he wouldn't, my dear," said the old man, tugging at the rope. "He'd have given you enough to buy a new silk dress, and a bonnet and feather—black 'uns, so that you might have come to the berrin' looking as well as the best of 'em."

"Would you, gran'fa?" cried the girl, with her eyes sparkling.

"Ay, that I would, my chuck, and the noo squire could have seen you, and—hist!"—*boom!*—"he'd have thought more of you than ever."

"Oh, for shame, gran'fa," said Dally. "You shouldn't. But will you give me the money now?"

"It's too late, my chucky."

"No, no, it isn't, gran'fa."

"But you must mind what you're doing, Dally."

Another tug at the bell-rope, and a loud *boom!* made the place quiver.

"I don't understand you, gran'pa."

"Oh, yes, you do. There, you come and see me to-night—no, to-morrow morning, and I'll see what I can do."

"You dear old gran'fa!" cried the girl. "But make haste; I want to go into that loft. You've got the key."

"Have I?"

"Yes, and if you don't make haste, Mr. Salis and Mr. May will be here, and I can't get through the vestry."

"Ah well, you feel in my pocket there—in the coat behind the door. It's the littlest key."

The girl darted to the old coat, and the next minute had drawn out four keys, all polished by long usage, the "littlest being a great implement, big enough to use for a weapon of war.

"There," said old Moredock, chuckling; "bring it back to me when you've done."

"Yes, gran'fa.'

"And mind young squire don't see you.'

"Oh, gran'fa, of course I will."

Rope rattle, boom, and a loud chuckle.

"Ah, that you will, Dally. There, be off, and don't forget to come to me to-morrow morning."

"I shan't forget, gran'fa," cried the girl, hurrying out, and going round by the back of the church to the vestry door, as another loud boom rang out from the church tower.

People were gathering, but Dally was not seen, and passing into the vestry, she opened the old oaken door in the corner, drew out the key to insert it on the other side, draw it to after her and lock herself in, and stand panting for a few moments before ascending the narrow, corkscrew staircase, which led to the traceried opening in the side of the chancel, from which place she could have an excellent view of all that was about to take place.

For it was to be "a fine berrin'."

This was the accepted term for Luke Candlish's funeral.

His brother, Tom, heir to the title and estate, consequent upon Luke's single life, had given orders to the London undertaker —very much to the disgust of the King's Hampton carpenter and upholsterer, as his sign-board announced, for this individual wanted to know why he couldn't bury the squire as well as a Londoner — that everything should be worthy of the family. So the London man had brought down his third best suite of funeral paraphernalia. The first was retained for magnates; the second for London folk of rank; the third for the leading country families, who always ordered and believed they had the best.

But it was very nearly the same. The ostrich plumes of sable hue were common to all ranks, and the velvet and silk palls and carriages that were used for the higher magnates one year, descended to the second place a year or so later, and then came into country use. It was only a question of freshness, and what could that matter when the eyes of the mourners were so veiled with

tears that they could not tell the new from the old?

So it was a fine berrin', with the carriages of all the neighbouring gentry sent down to follow, and a most impressive service, which, read impressively by the rector, who had driven over from King's Hampton, sounded almost blasphemous to Hartley Salis, who had the misfortune to know the character of the deceased by heart. The coffin of polished mahogany, with gilt handles, had been greatly admired; the favoured few had read the inscription; and when it was borne from the Hall to the church, that edifice was fairly well filled, and the carriages extended from the lych-gate right away down to Moredock's cottage—three hundred yards.

It was a funeral, but to very few was it a scene of sadness, being looked upon as a sight quite as interesting as a wedding, and the lookers-on had duly noted who descended from the various carriages to enter the church, among the followers being Cousin Thompson, who had found it necessary to stay down at his cousin's house with Horace North, to

transact a certain amount of business for the new baronet.

The doctor was not well pleased, for the society of his cousin bored him just at a time when his mind was full of great ideas which he was anxious to carry out; but he submitted with as good a grace as he could assume, and at the funeral they sat side by side in one of the carriages, and then occupied the same position in a pew. And while the Reverend Maurice May spoke with tears in his throat of the departed brother, the doctor thought of science, and his cousin of money, and of the brother who had not departed.

Mrs. Berens uttered a loud, hysterical sob once during the service, for she had gone so far as to hope at one time that she might become the mistress at the Hall.

This sob came from one part of the church, while a second sob came from the Rectory pew, where Leo sat—another who had once thought it possible that she might become the lady of the Hall through the deceased; and, as she sat there, she recalled certain love

passages which had taken place between them, prior to Luke Candlish displaying a greater fondness for a love of a more spirituous character, when his brother stepped into his place, and the fierce quarrels which had been common nearly ceased.

There were spectators in all parts of the church, Dally Watlock being the best placed, and out of sight of the congregation. She sat aloft, with her elbows on her knees, and her chin in her hands, watching two people—Leo Salis and Sir Thomas Candlish.

The girl's eyes flashed, and displayed her nervous excitement, as, with her head perfectly motionless, she watched, with her gaze now in one pew, now in the other, ready to trap the first glance. For to her it was no solemn scene, only a worldly battle, in which she had made up her little mind to come out victor.

The service proceeded, and Tom Candlish half sat, half knelt in his rarely occupied place, close to the grotesque effigy of his ancestors. He did not kneel, for he had an antipathy to making the knees of his new

black trousers dusty; but his mien was quite contrary to established custom. When he did attend Duke's Hampton church, he spent as much as possible of his time standing, with his hands resting over the side of the pew, staring at every woman in the place. Now, to Dally's great satisfaction, he did not once look about him, but kept his chin upon his breast—his way of displaying his grief.

Leo, in her place in the Rectory pew, was as careful of mien, and an ordinary watcher would have been content. But Dally Watlock was not an ordinary watcher, and she had settled in her own mind that Tom Candlish and Leo would, sooner or later, look at one another, if only for a moment, and it was to catch that glance she waited.

Dally was right, and the glance was so keen and quick that she was the only one who noticed it. But there it was, sure enough, just at the moment when the rector stepped down from the reading-desk, and there was a shuffling noise in the centre aisle, where the undertaker's men were busy.

One quick interchange at one moment, as if those two instinctively knew that the time had come, and Dally Watlock drew a long breath between her set teeth, while her little eyes glittered, and again seemed to flash.

Then the church slowly emptied, the churchyard filled, and the people formed a half-circle about the mausoleum, whose railing-gates stood open, and whose door at the foot of the stone steps gaped, while a faint glare came from within, to shine upon an end of the coffin, as the sun shone upon the other.

The Reverend Maurice May's pathetic voice rose and sank through the rest of the service to the time when the coffin was borne down the steps, and there rested once more; and his words sounded even more tearful still as he finished, closed the book, and with bent head took four steps into the vestry, and sat down and sighed, before removing his gown, bowing to his curate as if too much overcome to speak, and returning to his carriage, to follow the others to the Hall.

Meanwhile, with a great show of importance, Moredock assisted the undertaker's men in the closing of the yawning door of the vault, afterwards shutting the iron gates with a strange, echoing clang, and turning the key; while North, who seemed wrapped in thought, stood watching him.

At that moment Salis came out of the vestry, with his sister, and was about to go up to North and speak; but he drew back as Cousin Thompson came round the end of the chancel.

"Why, here you are!" exclaimed the latter. "The carriage is waiting, and all the rest are gone."

"Gone?" said the doctor dreamily. "Gone where?"

"Where? Why, up to the Hall, of course. We must hear the will."

"No," said North coldly; "the will does not concern me. I am not coming."

"Not coming?" cried Cousin Thompson. "Why, the man must be mad."

He hurried along the path, to spring into the carriage waiting at the gate, while after a

glance round at the knots of people waiting about the churchyard, North walked slowly up to old Moredock.

The old man saw him coming, and half turned away as if to speak to his grandchild, but North checked him.

"Moredock," he said quietly, "you'll want that medicine to-night."

"No, no, doctor," said the old man uneasily, "no more—no more."

"Yes, you will want some more," said the doctor meaningly; and the old man returned his fixed look, and then stood rubbing his withered yellow cheek with the key of the vault as the doctor walked away.

"I don't like it," he muttered. "I don't like it. Not in my way. Ah, Dally, my lass, going home?"

"I'm going back to the Rectory, if that's what you mean," said the girl shortly, as she turned away.

"Ah, there she goes," muttered the old man, "and why not? She's handsome enough. But the doctor—the doctor, coming down to-night. Well, I must do it; I must do it, I

suppose, for I can't get on without him, and it's too soon to die just yet. Bit o' money, too —a bit o' money. Man must save up, so as not to go in the workhouse. Dally, too. Fine clothes and feathers, and make a lady of her. Why not, eh? How do I know he wouldn't poison me next time if I didn't mind what he said?"

CHAPTER III.

FOR A SPECIAL REASON.

Jonadab Moredock sat smoking his pipe on the night of the funeral, after Luke Candlish had been laid to his rest. The old man sat in the dark for economical reasons, and whenever he drew hard at his pipe, the glow in the bowl faintly lit up his weird old face.

He was communing with himself, for apparently his conscience was pricking him with reminders of the past.

"Well," he muttered, "it was only lead, and bits o' zinc did just as well. Sold one of the bells if I could? Well, so I would, if they hadn't been so heavy. Much mine as anybody else's. I'm 'bout the oldest man in Hampton!"

He smoked on furiously, and shifted about in his chair.

"What was a man to do? Go to workhouse when he got old? No, I wouldn't do that. Only a few bones as the doctors wanted, and as would ha' rotted in the ground if they'd been left. Do good, too. Them as they b'longed to's glad they're able to do good with them, I know.

"Wish I'd a drop o' that physic, now. Seems to stir a man up like, and give him strength. Nasty job, but I'm not skeared! It was fancy that night. If I'd had a drop o' doctor's stuff I shouldn't ha' seen that head going along above the pews. No, I'm not skeared; but will he see—will he see?"

The old man fidgeted about uneasily in his chair, and had to refill and relight his pipe.

"Tchah! What would he know about 'em? How could he tell? Nobody but me's ever been down there, 'cept at funerals, and them as lives don't want 'em; they b'long to the dead. Dead don't want 'em, so they b'long to me. Ah!"

"Why, Moredock, did I frighten you?"

"Frighten me! No. Nothing frightens me; but you shouldn't come so sudden like upon a man."

"You shouted as if you had been hurt. What makes you sit in the dark?"

"'Cause I arn't afraid o' the dark," grumbled the old man. "Candles is candles, and costs money; don't they? Nobody gives me candles."

"Well, are you ready?"

"Ready? What for?"

"No nonsense, man. I'm not to be trifled th."

"Humph!" growled Moredock. "Brought that physic?"

"Yes, of course."

"Give's a drop, now. I'm about beat out. Hard work to-day."

North took a bottle from his pocket and set it on the table.

"Get a light, and you shall take a dose," he said.

"Nay; I want no light. I can see to do all I want without a light."

Moredock rose, went to a shelf, and took down a cup; the squeaking of the cork was followed by the gurgle of some fluid, and then there was a sound represented by the word "glug," and the sexton drew a long breath.

"Hah! that puts life in a man," he said.

"Be careful not to take too much."

"Ay! don't be skeared, doctor; I know," said the old man. "One thumb deep. I've measured it times enough. I didn't leave a light. Might take attention. Young Joe Chegg gets hanging about. Thinks he wants my Polly, but he won't get her. Comes peeping in at this window sometimes to see if she's here. Now I'm ready."

"Got everything you want?" said North. "Keys—lanthorn?"

"Ay! Got everything I want; but have you got everything you want?"

"Yes, man, yes."

"And look here, doctor; mind this: it's your job, and you're making me do it."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean as I arn't going to stand the

racket if it's found out. S'pose Parson Salis comes down upon me about it?"

"I understand you now," said the doctor sternly; "and I promise to hold you free."

"But it *is* for money, isn't it, doctor?" said Moredock insinuatingly.

"Money!" cried the doctor scornfully. "Do you think I would do this for money?"

The old man made a curious sound in his throat, which might have been laughing, but it was impossible to say, and then led the way out of the cottage, merely closing the door after them, and going on towards the church.

It was a singularly dark night, with not a breath of wind. Away to their left lay the principal part of the village; but not a light was visible; and, save for the uneasy barking of a dog at a distance, there was not a sound.

"Not like this i' the morning, doctor," whispered Moredock. "Place was like a fair."

"Don't talk," said the doctor sternly; and after emitting a grunt, the old sexton trudged steadily on to the lych-gate, which he opened,

the key clicking a little, and the lock giving a sharp snap.

"Shall I lock it, or leave it?"

"Leave it. No one will come here."

"Nay, I'll make sure," said the old man; and passing his hand through the open woodwork, he locked the gate and withdrew the key.

The two men ascended the steep pathway to the front of the church porch, and continued their journey round by the end of the chancel to the north, where the great mausoleum and the vestry stood side by side.

As they reached the end of the path where it stopped by the vestry door, Moredock paused to listen intently for a few moments.

"All right," he said; "not so much as a cat about;" and stooping down, he unlocked the iron gates at the head of the steps and they swung softly back. "Iled 'em well," whispered the sexton, "and the door below, too."

"Now look here, my man," whispered

North, "you can let me into the tomb, and then keep watch for me; or I will open the place myself, and bring you back the keys."

"Nay, doctor, I'm not skeared. I don't like the job, but now you've got me to start on it, I'll go on right to the end."

"That's right, Moredock; and you shall not regret it, man. As I've told you, it is for a special scientific reason."

"I don't know nothing 'bout scientific reason, doctor," whispered the old man; "but you said it was some'at to do wi' making men live longer."

"Yes, and it is."

"And that you'd stick to me, doctor, and make me live as long as Mephooslum if you could."

"Yes, Moredock, I did."

"And you'll stick to that bargain?"

"I will, on my honour as a man."

"Shak' han's on it once again, doctor. That's enough for me. I like a bit o' money, and I want it bad; but no money shouldn't ha' made me do this. I'm doing of it because it's to make men live longer."

"Yes, my man, it is."

"Then in we goes. Stop!"

"What now?"

"You won't bring him—Squire Luke—back to life again, will you? Because that won't answer my book."

"Silence, man, and keep to your bargain, as I will keep to mine."

Moredock drew a long breath, inserted the key, opened the heavy door of the great vault, and it, too, swung easily upon its well-oiled hinges, carefully prepared by the sexton for the funeral.

"You won't mind the dark for a minute, doctor?" whispered the old man.

"No," said the doctor, stepping in, followed by the sexton, who carefully closed the grim portal, and they stood together in the utter darkness in presence of generations of the dead.

CHAPTER IV.

MARY'S BELL.

It had been a gloomy evening at the Rectory. Leo had been unusually silent, and Salis greatly disturbed by a letter he had received from the rector.

That gentleman had only spoken to him just so far as the sad business upon which they had been engaged demanded, and had gone back to King's Hampton on his way to town, probably to treat his curate there in the same way, and had left a voluminous letter, like a sermon, written upon the text "Neglect," for Salis to peruse.

He had read the letter and re-read it to his sisters, with the result that Leo had sighed, looked sympathetic, and then gone on

with her book; while Mary had sat back in her easy-chair and listened and advised.

"I don't know what more I could do," said Salis, wrinkling his brow. "I suppose I do neglect the parish entrusted to me by my rector, but it is from ignorance. I want to do what's right."

He looked down in a perplexed way at his sister, who dropped her work upon her knee, and extended her hand with a tender smile.

"Come here," she said. "Kneel down."

Salis obeyed, and glanced at Leo, whose face was hidden by her book, before stooping down lower to accept the proffered kiss.

"My dear old brother," whispered Mary, gliding her soft, white arm about his neck "don't talk like that. Neglect! My memory is too well stored with your deeds to accept that word. Why, your life here has been one long career of self-denial."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"Of deeds of charity, of nights spent by sick-beds, facing death and the most infectious

diseases. How much of your stipend do you ever spend upon yourself or us?"

"Well, not much, Mary," he said, with his perplexed look deepening. "You see, there are so many poor."

"Who would rise up in revolt if you were to leave."

"Yes, I suppose so, dear; but I have been very remiss lately and extravagant."

"Hartley!"—reproachfully.

"Well, I have, dear. I've smoked a great deal—and fished."

"At your medical man's desire; to give you strength; to refresh you for your work."

"But these things grow upon one," said Salis dismally.

"Nonsense, dear; you must have some relaxation. See what a slave you are to the parish—and to me."

"Why, that's my relaxation," he said tenderly. "But really, dear, it almost seems as if he wants to drive me to resign."

"Well, Hartley," said Mary sadly, "if it must be so we will go. Surely there are

hundreds of parishes where my brother would be welcome."

"But how could I leave my people here? My dear Mary, I have grown so used to Duke's Hampton that I believe it would break my heart to go."

"And mine," said Mary to herself, "if it be not already broken."

"I must answer the letter, I suppose," said Salis dolefully, "and promise to amend my ways."

"Is it not bed-time, Hartley?" said Leo, with a yawn.

"Bless my soul, yes," cried the curate, glancing at his watch. "Time does go so when one is talking."

"I'm very tired," said Leo. "It has been an anxious day."

"I shall be obliged to sit down for an hour and set down the heads of my letter, I suppose," said Salis.

"To-night, Hartley?" cried Leo, suddenly displaying great interest in her brother's welfare. "No, no; don't do that. You seem so fagged."

"Yes, you seem tired out, dear," said Mary.

"Go and have a good night's rest," said Leo, smiling, and rising to kiss him. "Good night, dear. Good night, Mary. But you will go to bed, Hartley?"

"Well," he said, "if you two order it I suppose I must."

"And we do order it," said Leo playfully; "eh, Mary?"

"Yes, get up early and have a good morning's walk," said Mary, with the result that the lamp was extinguished after candles had been lit. Leo went to her room, and Hartley Salis performed his regular task of carrying his sister to her door; after which, by the help of a couple of crutch-handled sticks, she could manage to get about.

An hour later all was hushed at the Rectory, and another hour passed when Hartley Salis had been dreaming uneasily of listening to a lecture from the rector about his neglect of the parish, the rector striking hard on the principle of the rough who blunders against a person and exclaims—

"Where are yer shoving to?" The lecture had reached an imaginary point at which the rector had exclaimed, with his hand on the bell:

"And now we understand one another, Mr. Salis. Good morning."

The bell rang just over the curate's head, and he jumped out of bed and hurried on his dressing-gown, for that bell communicated with Mary's room, and had been there ever since her illness had assumed so serious a form.

"What is it, Mary; are you ill?"

"No, no, dear," came back through the slightly opened door; "but there is something wrong."

"Wrong?"

"Yes. I certainly heard a door open and close downstairs."

CHAPTER V.

THE SEXTON HAS A GLASS.

The Candlish mausoleum had been built by an architect who had an excellent idea of the beauties of the Jacobean style, and he had got over the many-windowed difficulty by making those windows blank. The stone mullions, with their tracery, were handsome, and the way in which the arms of the Candlish family had been introduced where there was room reflected great credit upon him. In places where the arms would not stand there was always room for a crest or a shield, so that the chapel-like structure was an improvement to the old church.

But after the exterior had been named, with its grand roof, massive door, and finely

forged gate and rails, the less said about design the better. Mausoleums were evidently not the architect's strong point; and when he came to the interior he was at his worst.

This was to be a partly underground structure, and the architect's ideas of underground structures were divided between coal-cellars and cellars to hold wine.

Now the former, he felt, would be antiseptic, and a great improvement upon the unhealthy contrivance designed by the sculptors of a past generation to do honour to the first baronet at the expense of his fellow-creatures who have malefited to a horrible extent by the proceedings of our forefathers in regard to the disposal of their mortal remains; but this architect wisely decided that the coal-cellar idea would be repugnant to the builder; so he fell back upon the other.

Consequently for generations the Candlishes had been regularly stowed away in so many stone bins, with labels at the ends of the coffins, to tell who and what they were.

But the great family did not resemble

wine, for they did not improve by keeping; and when Moredock struck a match, and lit his lanthorn to hold it above his head, there were traces on all sides of the touch of time.

The wine-cellar idea was there, for the floor was deeply covered with turpentiny sawdust; cobwebs hung in folds; here and there loathsome-looking, slimy fungi had sprung up; mouldering destruction everywhere nearly; and Moredock watched the doctor eagerly as he gazed round, seeing much, but not that which the sexton wished concealed, for if the light of careful inspection had been brought to bear here, sad recollections respecting costly handles and plates would have been brought to light, while, had the inspection been carried further by the modern representatives of the family, the number of uncles and aunts and grandparents who were wholly or partially missing, as well as their leaden homes, would have been startling, and about all of whom Jonadab Moredock could have told a tale.

But the doctor's was only a cursory glance

round at the niches containing the dead, for he turned at once to the coffin lying upon a stone table in the very centre of the vault, which place it would occupy till the doors yawned for another of the Candlishes, when the late Sir Luke would be stowed somewhere on one side.

It was a weird scene as the doctor set down a small leather bag upon the stone table beside the coffin, and produced a lamp with chimney and shade. This lamp when lit cast a yellow glare all over the place, and reflections were cast by tarnished plates and gilded nail-heads from the more obscure portions of the vault.

The sexton looked on curiously after setting his lanthorn, with open door, just inside one of the vacant niches, and his yellow features gave him the aspect of some ghastly old demon come hither for the performance of hideous rites.

"I've brought some tools, doctor," he whispered, as he took a large screw-driver from his pocket.

"I too have come provided," said the

doctor, taking sundry implements from his black bag. "Now, Moredock, I want everything to remain here night after night, just as I leave it, ready for me when I come again."

"Come again?" growled the sexton. "What, shan't you finish to-night?"

"Perhaps not this month," was the stern answer.

Moredock stared.

"Why, you——"

"Hush!" said the doctor sternly. "Now, what are you going to do—stay and assist me, or go? If you have the slightest nervous dread, pray leave me at once."

"Nay, I'm not skeared, doctor," said the old man grimly. "I've seen too much o' this sort o' thing. I was a bit frightened when I saw that head going along through the church without the body, but I'm not feared of this."

"Stop, then, and help," said the doctor. "I'll pay you well. Can you use a screw-driver?"

Moredock chuckled and took off his coat,

which he hung upon one of the ornamental handles of an old coffin foot. Then rolling up his shirt-sleeves over his thin, sinewy arms, he took up a screw-driver—one that he had brought—and as deftly as a carpenter began removing the screws from the handsome coffin-lid.

As Moredock attacked the head, the doctor busied himself at the foot, with the result that in a few minutes the screws were all laid together upon the stone ledge at the side of the vault, and the coffin-lid, with its engraved breast-plate, setting forth the name, age, and date, was lifted up, and stood on end out of the way.

"What will be the best way of opening this?" said the doctor, as he held the lamp over the gleaming lead inner coffin, with its diamond pattern and silvery-looking solder marks along the sides. "Had we better melt the solder?"

"Melt the sawder?" said Moredock, with a chuckle. "I'll show you a trick worth two of that."

He went to where his coat hung, and took

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out of one of the pockets a short, curved, chisel-looking tool with a keen point and a stout handle.

"There, doctor, that's the jockey for this job. Want it right open?"

"Yes; I want the lid right off. Can you manage it?"

"Can I manage it!" chuckled the old man derisively. "Look!"

Strange thoughts invaded the doctor's breast as to what at different times had been the pursuits of the old sexton, as he saw him take the singular-looking tool, place its point at the extreme right-hand corner of the leaden coffin, place his shoulder against the butt of the handle, and press down, when the point penetrated the thin lead at once, right over the top of the curved blade. The rest was simple, for the old man only worked the handle up and down close to the side where, acting as a lever, the curved steel cut through the metal with the greatest ease, an inch slit at a time, so that in a very few minutes the top corner was reached.

Then the head was cut across, and the old man paused to go back to the foot and cut across there.

"Why didn't you continue cutting round?" said the doctor, speaking in a low, subdued tone.

"You let me be, doctor," said Moredock, with an unpleasant laugh. "If it was a leg, I shouldn't say naught, but let you do it. This is more in my way. Look here."

He finished cutting the lead as he spoke, and then with a grim laugh inserted his fingers in the slit, raised it a little, and then going to the uncut side, hooked his fingers in again, placed his knee against the coffin, and after the exercise of some little force, drew the long leaf of lead over towards him, the uncut side acting like the hinges of a lid, and laying bare the contents of the ghastly case.

"There," said the old sexton; "that means less trouble when we come to shut him up again."

"You seem to know," said the doctor quickly.

"Man in my line picks up a few things, doctor," replied the sexton. "But there you are. What next?"

The doctor took the lamp once more, and held it over the head of the coffin, to scan with the deepest interest the head and face revealed.

"Skeared!" said Moredock grimly; "what is there to be skeared on? Only seems to be asleep."

"Yes," said the doctor, gazing down and thoughtfully repeating the sexton's words; "seems to be asleep. Suppose he is?"

The old man stared with his jaw dropping, and his features full of wonder.

"Asleep? Nay, you said he'd broke his neck. No sleep that, poor chap."

"Hush!" said the doctor.

Moredock looked at him curiously, as he bent lower over the occupant of the coffin.

"Rum game for us if he were only asleep," muttered the sexton uneasily. "Dally wouldn't like that, and I shouldn't like it. That wouldn't do."

"Hale, strong — life arrested by that

sudden accident," said the doctor, as he laid his hand upon the cold forehead. "It must be possible. I am satisfied now, and I will."

"Did you speak, doctor?" said Moredock.

"No. Yes," said North, setting down the lamp quickly. "Here, help me."

Moredock approached, wondering what was to be done next, and with a vague idea in his brain that the doctor was about to test whether the body before them contained any remains of life before making some examination for increasing his anatomical knowledge.

"Now, quick. Lift."

"We two can't lift that, doctor. It takes four men. Why, there was eight to bring it down."

"Can we shift it to the edge of this slab?"

"Ay, we might do that." And lifting first at the head, and then at the foot, they moved the coffin to the extreme edge of the stone table, leaving a good space on one side.

"Now, then, lift again. I will take the head; you the feet."

"What! lift him out, doctor?"

"Yes, man, yes. Don't waste time."

Moredock hesitated for a moment, and drew a long breath. Then, obeying the orders he had received, he helped to lift the body out upon the table, where it lay white and strange-looking in the yellow light.

"Now we can easily lift the coffin," said North. "Over yonder—out of the way."

The sexton uttered a low whistle, as he once more obeyed, taking the bottom handle of the massive casket, and it was placed on one side close to where a generation or two of the passed-away Candlishes lay in their bin-like niches.

This done, the old man passed his arm across his damp forehead.

"Mind me having a pipe, doctor?" he said uneasily. "This is a bit extry like. I didn't know——"

"No, no; you must not smoke here," said the doctor hastily. "One moment—into the middle of the table here."

Moredock obeyed again, and the recumbent figure of the dead squire was placed exactly where the coffin had stood.

"That will do," said North. "Now, Moredock, what do you say to a glass?"

"Glass? Ay, doctor. Want it badly," cried the old man eagerly, as the doctor produced a silver flask, drew the cup from the bottom, and gave it to the sexton.

Before doing so, however, North gave the flask a sharp shake, and the old man's eyes sparkled as his countenance assumed a suspicious look at this movement, so suggestive of medicine.

"I say, what is it?" he said.

"What is it? Cordial."

"Brandy?"

"No."

"Look here, doctor," said the old sexton hoarsely; "no games."

North paused.

"Shall I tell you what you are thinking, Moredock?" he said.

"Nay, you can't do that, clever as you are," cried the old man with a chuckle.

"I can. You are thinking that I have poison here, ready to give you a dose, so that you may die out of the way, and never be able to expose me by betraying what you have seen."

The old man's jaw dropped again, and his face grew more wrinkled and puckered up, if possible, as he scratched his head with one yellow claw.

"Well, it were some'at o' that kind," he said, with a grim chuckle.

"You old fool!" exclaimed the doctor; "don't I know that you could not expose me without exposing yourself? Do you think me blind?"

"Nay, doctor, nay; you're a sharp one. You can see too much."

"Have I not seen how dexterous you are at work of this kind? Do you think I cannot read what it all means? Moredock, I'll be bound to say that one way or another you have made yourself a rich man."

"No, no, doctor; no, no!" cried the sexton. "A few pounds gathered together to

keep me out of the workus some day when I grow old."

"You think that I want to poison you, then, and to hide your body here?"

"Nay, nay, doctor, I don't. You haven't got no need, have you? Give us a drop of the stuff."

"Yes, we are wasting time," said North, pouring out a portion of the contents of his flask, and handing it to the old man, who took it, and, in spite of all said, smelt it suspiciously.

"'Tarn't poison, is it, doctor?" he said piteously.

"Yes, if you took enough of it. But that drop will not hurt you. There, don't be afraid. Toss it off. It is a liqueur."

The old man hesitated for a moment, gazing wildly at the doctor, and then tossed it off at a draught.

"There! Do you feel as if you are going to fall down dead, old man, and do you wonder which of these old niches I shall put you in?"

"Tchah! don't talk stuff, doctor," said the old fellow, putting his hand to his throat; "you wouldn't do such a thing. That's good! That's prime stuff. I never tasted nothing like that afore. It warms you like, and makes you feel ready to do anything. Skeared! Who's skeared? Tchah! What is there to mind? I'm ready, doctor. I'll help you. What shall I do next?"

"Sit down on that ledge for a bit till I want you."

"Ay, to be sure," chuckled the old sexton, as he seated himself on a low projection at the far end of the vault. "That's prime stuff. I could drink another drop of that, doctor. But you go on. Nobody can't see from outside, for I've put lights in here before now, and shut the doors of a night, and tried it. There isn't a crack to show; so you go on."

The doctor watched the weird-looking old man, as he settled himself comfortably, with his back in the corner, and went on muttering and chuckling.

"Brandy's nothing to it," he went on—

"tasted many a good drop in my time. Eh? What say, doctor?"

"You shall have some more another time."

"Can't see outside. Skeared? Tchah! It wouldn't frighten a child."

The doctor approached him, but the old man took no notice, and went on muttering:

"He! he! he! I could tell you something. I will some day. Frighten a child. Old man? Tchah! Mean to live—long—Ah!"

The last ejaculation was drawn out into a long sigh, followed by a heavy, regular breathing.

North placed his fingers in the sexton's neckcloth to make sure that there was no danger of strangulation, and then turned away.

"Good for four or five hours, Master Moredock," he said; and then, with his face lighting up strangely — "in the service of science—ambition—yes, and for the sake of love. Shall I succeed?"

He paused for a few minutes, bending over the body on the table.

"It seems very horrible, but it is only the dread of a man about to venture into the unknown. The first doctor who performed a serious operation must have felt as I do now, and——What's that?"

He started upright, throwing his head back, and shaking it quickly, as if he had suffered from a sudden vertigo.

"Pooh! nothing; a little excitement. Now for my great discovery, for I must—I will succeed."

He stooped down quickly, and took a bottle and a case of instruments from his black bag, when once more the curious sensation came over him, and he shook his head again.

"The air is close and stifling," he said, as he recovered himself. "I could have fancied that something brushed by my face."

Then, bending over the prostrate figure he rapidly laid bare again, four hours quickly passed away in the gloomy vault, where the yellowish rays of the shaded lamp shone

directly down upon his busy fingers, and the stony face of him who lay motionless in his deep sleep.

Four hours, and then he laid his hand upon the old sexton, who started up wildly, and extended his claw-like hands, as if about to seize him by the throat.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DOCTOR IS NERVOUS.

"It's all very well, Master North, for you to come here bullying me about my health, and ordering me to go fishing, and half ruin myself with cigars," said the curate; "but I feel disposed to retort, 'Physician, heal thyself.' Why, you're as white as so much dough."

"Nonsense!" cried the doctor hastily.

"Prisoner denies the impeachment," said Salis. "First witness—Mary Salis—what do you say?"

Mary smiled at North, as she said quietly:

"I think Doctor North looks worn and pale."

"There, you hear," cried Salis triumphantly.

"I'm not convinced," said North. "I shall call a witness on my side. Leo, will you speak for me?"

"Certainly I will," said Leo quietly, as she looked up from her inevitable book.

"Do I look pale and worn out?"

Leo shook her head.

"No," she said quietly. "I think you look very well. Only, perhaps, a little more earnest than of old."

"Thank you — thank you," cried the doctor eagerly.

"Why, he looks bad," said Salis; "and it's a horrible piece of imposture for him to come here bullying me and wanting to give me abominable decoctions, besides leading me into idleness and debauchery, when all the time he cannot keep himself right."

"Nonsense!" cried the doctor pettishly. "I never was better; never more busy."

"The fellow's a humbug," said Salis, bringing his hand down on the table with a rap. "I'll tell you what's the matter."

North turned upon him a look so full of mingled entreaty and annoyance that he checked himself.

"No," he said, laughing, "I am as bad as Horace North. I can't tell you what's the matter unless it is that he is working too hard over his craze."

North looked at him keenly, and his pallor increased.

"Well, I must be off up to the church. I want to see my friend, Moredock."

"To see Moredock?" said the doctor, with a quick, uneasy look at the speaker.

"Yes. I'm not satisfied with the old man's proceedings."

"What has he been doing?" said the doctor, who fidgeted in his seat, and seemed anything but himself.

"Oh, I'm going to make no special charges against him," said the curate. "Coming my way?"

"N—no, yes," said North, rising, and going to Mary's couch to shake hands, her eyes looking up into his with a calm, patient

smile full of resignation and desire for his happiness, which he could not read.

He turned then to Leo, who was reading, and evidently deeply engrossed in her book.

"Going?" she said, letting it fall, and looking up with a placid smile. "What lovely weather, is it not?"

North said it was delightful, as he bent impressively over the extended hand, and gazed with something of a lover's rapture in the beautiful eyes that looked up into his; but there was no returning pressure of the hand; the look was merely pleasant and friendly, and, worn out with anxiety, sleeplessness, and watching, he could not help feeling a thirst for something more, if it were merely sympathy, instead of those calmly bland smiles and gently tolerant reception of his advances.

"Why, Horace, old man, I did not hurt you with my banter?" said Salis, as they walked up towards the church.

"Hurt me? No. I'm a little upset;

that's all. Salis, old fellow, I'm not quite happy."

"No?" said the curate inquiringly, as he looked sidewise at his friend's wrinkled face.

"I seem to make no progress with Leo."

"Is that so, or is it your fancy?" said the curate guardedly.

"It is so. She seems to tolerate me. You notice it."

"I notice that she is very quiet and thoughtful with you, but really that is a good sign."

"You would like to see her my wife, Salis?"

"If it were for your happiness and hers, I would gladly see you man and wife," said the curate warmly; "but don't be hasty, my dear fellow. It is for life, remember."

"Remember? Oh, yes, I know all that," said North hastily.

Salis extended his hand, which the other took.

"Don't be offended with me, Horace, old friend. I wish to see you both happy."

"I know it, I know it," said the doctor;

and then catching sight of Moredock in the churchyard, he hesitated, half nervous as to what Salis might have to say to the old man, but, convinced the next moment that his fears were without base, he hurriedly said a few words and went away.

"I can't see it," said Salis bitterly. "They seem so thoroughly unsuited the one for the other. I wish it could have been so, for Leo's sake. Ah, well," he added, as he walked through the old gate, "time settles these things better than we can. Good morning, Moredock."

"Mornin', sir—mornin'."

"Is the vestry open?"

"Yes, sir; door's open, sir. You can go through the church or round at the back. Through the church is best."

"I prefer going round," said the curate gravely; and he went on round by the chancel, followed by the grim old sexton, who watched him furtively, and went up quite close, with his big yellow ears twitching, as Salis paused by the little path leading to the steps of the Candlish vault.

"What's that?" he said.

"Eh? What, sir?" said Moredock, hastily stepping before him to snatch up a pocket-handkerchief and crumple it in his hands. "Only a bit of white rag, sir. Blowed there from somebody's washing hung out to dry."

"Nonsense!" said the curate sternly. "Give it to me."

"Doctor's," said Moredock to himself. "The fool!"

He handed the piece of linen unwillingly, and the curate took it, held it out, and turned to the corners, while the sexton's countenance lightened up.

"Humph! 'T. Candlish, 24,'" said Salis, reading aloud. "The new baronet is going to favour the church, then, with his presence, I suppose," he added sarcastically, as Moredock drew a breath full of relief, but shivered again as he saw the curate glance at the mausoleum.

"Noo squire's, is it, sir?"

"Yes, and I beg his pardon," said the curate gravely, as he thought of how lately

the young man's brother had been laid there to rest. "Moredock, ask Mrs. Page to carefully wash and iron the handkerchief, and then you can send one of the school children over with it to the Hall."

"Yes, sir," said the sexton, with a feeling of relief.

"Now come into the vestry. I want to talk to you."

"Grumbling again — grumbling again," muttered the old man, as he followed his superior, to stand before him, humbly waiting for the lecture he expected to receive, but with his conscience quite at rest respecting the vault.

"Now, Moredock," said Salis, "I have received a letter from Mr. May, in which he speaks very severely of the state of the churchyard."

"Why, he never said nothing when he were here."

"No ; it seems as if he preferred to write, and in addition to complaining of the state of the grass, he thinks that the walks are in very bad condition."

"Why didn't he say so, then?"

"I tell you he preferred to write."

"How can I help the place looking bad when they sheep as Churchwarden Candlish put in was always galloping over the graves!"

"Yes; the sheep do make the place untidy," said the curate, with a sigh.

"And now it'll be just as bad as ever, for Squire Tom sent a fresh lot in 'smorning by one of his men."

"But the walks, Moredock — the weeds in the walks. You know I've complained before."

"Well, look how bad my back's been. How could I weed walks with a back as wouldn't bend; and seems to me, parson, as a man as has seen a deal, as it 'd be better if you mended your own ways about church 'fore you finds fault w' an old servant like me."

"What do you mean?" said the curate sternly.

"Why, I mean that," said the old man, pointing to the floor with an extremely

grubby finger. "I've got it to keep clean, and I do it; but you grumbled at me for smoking a pipe one day when I was digging a nasty grave. You said it wer'n't decent to smoke in the churchyard."

"I did, Moredock, and I repeat it."

"And I say as 'tarn't decent to smoke in vestry, and chuck the bits o' cigars about. You're always a-smoking now."

Salis turned crimson as he followed the direction of the pointing finger, and saw several traces of white ash and the stump of a cigar.

"Why, Moredock, I—I——"

"There, don't go and deny it, parson. You've took to smoking bad as any one now; and I've allus done my best about church, and it comes hard to be found fault on, and if it's coming to this, sooner I goes the better, and sooner Mr. May finds fault with you the better, too."

The old man walked defiantly out of the vestry, and went toward his cottage, while Salis picked up the cigar stump and thrust it into his pocket.

"How provoking!" he said. "Must be growing fearfully absent, and dropped it. I'm sure I did not smoke here when I came yesterday—no, it was the day before — to find out about that old baptismal entry. I must have walked in smoking, and thrown the end of the cigar down. Good gracious! If May had seen me—or anybody else. It is outrageous. I'm growing quite a slave to the habit, and forgetful of everything I do. Tut—tut—tut! How provoking! The old man is quite right. How can I reproach him again!"

He walked gloomily back home, meeting Mrs. Berens, and so absorbed in his thoughts that he passed without looking at her, making the fair widow flush and return hastily to her house, to be seized with a hysterical fit, which became so bad that North was summoned to administer sal volatile, and calm the suffering woman down, as she asked herself what had she done that dear Mr. Salis should treat her so.

Meanwhile Jonadab Moredock had reached his cottage, raised the big wooden latch, and

passed in with a sudden bounce, but only to start, as he found himself confronted by Dally Watlock.

"Ah, gran'fa!" cried the girl hastily, trying to conceal her confusion and something else; "why, there you are!"

"Yes," said the old man suspiciously; "here I am, and what do you want?"

"Oh! only to say that you mustn't forget what you promised."

"Oh! I shan't forget," said the old man. "But you arn't—you arn't been meddlin' with anything, have you?" and he looked inquisitively round.

"Meddling; oh no, gran'fa, dear! I've only just come in, and I can't stop. But do help me. I should like some nice dresses, and you would like to see me there."

"What, missus up at the Hall, my lass? Yes, and you shall be, too. There, give's a kiss. Be a good gel, and you shall have some money and fine clothes and feathers; and I'll get a strong lot o' chaps together as shall ring the bells for hours the day you're wed."

"Oh, you dear old gran'fa. He shall marry me, shan't he?"

"Ay, that he shall, my pretty. Well, if you must go, good-bye."

"Yes, and he shall marry me, my fine madam," muttered Dally, as with flushed face and sparkling eyes she turned back to the Rectory. "Well, if it isn't Joe Chegg," she cried in a vexed tone, as she saw the young man coming, and turned through a gate into the river meadows, to avoid that rustic and get in by the back way.

"You think you can be very clever," continued Dally; "but other people can be clever, too. Let's be sure this is the right one," she added, as she drew a big key out of her pocket.

"Yes; that's the one he give me before. Two can play at that game, Miss," she continued, with a vicious look, as she thrust the stolen key into her pocket. "Ha—ha—ha! how foolish I can make her look. Jealous? No, I'm not jealous; for I'm going to win the day as soon as I've made quite sure."

Joe Chegg was in pursuit, but Dally

took the back way through the Rectory orchard, and passed Leo on her way in.

"Been out, Dally?"

"Yes, Miss. And I'm very busy. And yes, Miss!" she added, as soon as she was alone; "I've got the key in my pocket. You're very clever; but perhaps Dally Watlock can be clever, too."

CHAPTER VII.

JOE CHEGG FETCHES HIS TOOLS.

"I DON'T like it, and I mean to find it out," said Joe, scratching his head on one side. "And if I find as there be anything going on twix' new squire and she, why I'll——"

Joe Chegg did not say what he would do, but raised the other hand to give his head a good scratch on the far side.

He then paused in his work to stand and examine it, his mind wandering amid the flowers which hung in wreaths; and these wreaths of brilliant hues naturally associated themselves with Dally Watlock, the young lady who had made a very deep impression, and was now causing the young man great uneasiness of spirit.

Joe Chegg was the universal genius of Duke's Hampton, and was ready to turn his hand to anything. Did a neighbour's saucepan leak, Joe said it was a pity to send it over to the town, when maybe he would set it right by clumsily melting a dab of solder over the hole. Did Mrs. Berens' gate want mending, Joe Chegg would bring up a hammer and nails and armour-clothe the wood-work with the amount of iron he attached. He was great upon locks. As a rule they did not lock much when he had attacked them; but Joe generally got the credit of having done them good. He worked in iron and in lead, but he was more wooden than anything else, and delighted in having an opportunity to use a saw.

Nothing, however, pleased him better than being sent for at times to do up the Rectory or Mrs. Berens' garden, where he would in one day do more mischief to flower and vegetable than an ordinary jobbing gardener would achieve in three; and if it were the time of year when he had an opportunity to prune, why, then the poor trees

had a holiday, for they had neither flower nor fruit to carry for the next two or three seasons.

On the present occasion, Mrs. Berens had found half-a-dozen rolls of paper-hanging of one pattern stored away in the attic, and had decided to have a small room papered therewith.

Now, being a sensitive lady with but little knowledge of human nature, in her ignorance of the fact that the party appealed to would have come at once and made a good job of it for Mrs. Berens and himself, this lady now felt that the King's Hampton painter would not care to come and paper her room as she had not purchased the paper of him, so Joe Chegg was thought of, and set to work.

It had taken him a long time to begin, for he had to make his own paste. Then while the paste was cooling, he had to fetch his scissors, and it was while fetching these that he had seen, given chase to, and missed Dally Watlock.

He had returned to his work and trimmed

the rolls of paper, frowning very severely the while.

That took him to dinner-time, with the paper suggesting Dally at every turn. It rustled like Dally's clothes did when she whisked round; the selvage he cut off ran up into curls like Dally's hair; it smelt like Dally—a peculiarly fresh, soapy odour; it suggested a snug cottage that he would paper with his own hands; and then, too, the pattern — how he would like to buy Dally a dress like that.

After dinner the paper still suggested Dally so much, as aforesaid, with its wreaths and flowers that as Joe Chegg worked away he had slowly achieved to the hanging of three pieces, when Mrs. Berens, all silk and scent and lace, rustled into the room to see how he was getting on.

"Why, Joe," she exclaimed; "you've hung it upside down!"

It was no wonder, for ever since he had seen Dally that morning, Joe Chegg had been upside down.

He did not, like Mr. Sullivan's immor-

talised British workman, say, "It'll be all right when it's dry," but looked sheepish, and stared hard at the paper, to see that the roses were all hanging their heads, and the stems pointing straight up.

"Upside down, ma'am?" he said, with a feeble smile.

"Yes, Joe; and you a gardener. Now, did you ever see flowers grow like that?"

"When they've come unnailed, ma'am," said Joe, with a happy thought.

"Nonsense, man! It looks ridiculous."

"Shall I peel it off, ma'am?"

"No; absurd! You must paper all over that again. It's just so much waste of paper-hanging. There, don't stare, man, but go on."

Mrs. Berens was rather cross, and she snubbed Joe Chegg in a way that brought tears to the young man's eyes, which he concealed by stooping over the paste pail, and slopping about the contents so vigorously that Mrs. Berens, in dread for her garments, hastily beat a retreat.

"It's of no good," said Joe Chegg, "a

man can't hang paper properly when he's in love; and when he's crossed and crissed and bothered as I am, he feels a deal more fit to hang himself. I'll go and do it!"

This expression of a determination, however, alluded to something in Joe Chegg's mind which had nothing whatever to do with what lawyers term in legal language *sus per col.* He had made certain plans in his own head, and the cogitating over these had resulted in Mrs. Berens' paper-hangings being upside down; and for the furtherance of these plans he packed up his work for the day, went down into the kitchen, where he announced to the maids that he was going to fetch his tools, and then started off home.

That night Joe Chegg behaved furtively. He waited until it was dusk, and then went out cautiously as a conspirator, as he thought, but made enough noise to put any one upon his guard, while he felt satisfied himself that his secrecy and care were surprising.

"She can't deceive me," he said to himself, with a satisfied grin, and, going along

by fence-side and hedge, he placed himself in a position to watch, which would not have deceived a child.

The place he chose was opposite the sexton's, where he waited till Moredock came out, somewhere about the time when other people went to bed.

Joe Chegg hailed this as a sign that the coast would be clear, and Dally Watlock soon make her appearance to keep an appointment, for he had good reason to believe that she did meet somebody, and it was to have a certain proof that he was there.

But the hours wore on, and no Dally made her appearance, and Joe Chegg's hands went very far down into his pockets, and his forehead grew deeply knit.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHY DALLY BORROWED THE KEY.

THERE was a reason for Dally's non-appearance at the sexton's cottage, and that reason was that she did not stir out of the Rectory that evening, but was exceedingly attentive if the bell was rung, and about ten o'clock presented herself at the study door to know if there was anything else wanted before she went up to bed, for it was to be a busy morning, and she wanted to be up early, etcetera, etcetera.

Mary wanted nothing more, and Leo gave consent, so Dally Watlock went up to bed, but did not go.

On the contrary, she bustled about for some little time without attempting to un-

dress, spoke to her fellow-servant through the plaster wall, and ended by yawning loudly and extinguishing her candle. Then softly opening her window she sat down by it to enjoy the softness and beauty of the dark, calm night.

The old Rectory at Duke's Hampton stood back fifty yards from the road, with its back to the meadows through which ran the sparkling trout-stream. There was a fine old garden full of bushy evergreens and tall, flowering shrubs, so that partly through the efforts of nature, partly through the cunning of the ancient gardener who had planned the place ingeniously, it was quite possible for half-a-dozen people to be about the place at once without being aware of each other's presence.

The beautiful old ivy-clad place was built in the shape of an L, with steep gable-ends; and matters had been so arranged that while Salis and poor invalid Mary slept in the front, Leo's pretty bedroom was placed so that she could look straight down the green-embowered path right to the meadows. Just below her

window was an old rustic summer-house, covered with clematis and jasmine; a little more to the right, in the angle of the L, was a tiny vinery, and beyond that the lean-to tool-house—made an object of beauty by the dense mass of ivy which clustered over the thatched roof and walls.

Hence it was that while Leo could look down on the creeper-covered summer-house, and across at the ivy-clad tool-house and the rose-encircled bedroom window of Dally Watlock, the latter apple-cheeked young lady enjoyed the reverse view, with the slight disadvantage that when she looked across at Leo's window, she could not see roses, but the long, laurel-like leaves of a great magnolia, carefully trained all round—a matter not of the smallest importance, for Dally preferred the window to its surroundings.

Dally's proceedings were strange that night. She sat there eager and watchful till there was a sudden glow in Leo's window, indicating that her young mistress had gone up to bed. Then as she watched she saw the blind drawn aside, and a shadowy hand un-

fasten the casement, throw it open, and put in the iron hook.

Dally drew a long breath full of satisfaction, and then waiting till the blind dropped and the shadow of Leo appeared upon it from time to time, she proceeded to behave in a remarkably strange manner for a young person whose character means her life as a domestic servant.

Dally said softly through her nipped-together teeth :

"I thought as much, ma'am!" and then, with all the activity of a boy of fourteen, she tied a dark handkerchief tightly over her head and under her chin, stepped from her chair on to the window-sill, lowered herself on to the top of the tool-house, where she lay flat down in the bed of leaves, to form, had it been light, as prettily rustic-looking an idea for an artist of a Dryad in her leafy wreath as he need wish to have.

But Dally Watlock was not going to have a night's rest *al fresco*, for she was exceedingly wide awake, and as soon as she was extended at full length parallel with her part of the

house, and with her feet towards that portion where her superiors slept, she began to revolve upon her own axis in a very slow and careful manner, down and down the ivy slope of the lean-to thatched shed, there being plenty of stout ivy-boughs for her to grasp, so as to act as breaks and govern her speed. Now she was on her side, then as she slowly turned, her little red face was buried in the dark green leaves. A little more and it came up, and she was on the other side, and soon after upon her back. And so on and on till, merely crushing down the leaves a little, and without breaking a twig, she rolled down to the very edge, when, holding on tightly by the ivy, she let her legs drop, and touched the earth, making scarcely any more noise than a cat.

She remained perfectly motionless for a few minutes, and then crept stealthily to the main green walk in the garden, gazed watchfully back at Leo's window, where the head and shoulders of her young mistress could be plainly seen upon the illuminated blind, and then ran swiftly down the grass path to the

iron hurdle which separated the garden from the meadow, climbed it like a boy and as quickly, and then ran rapidly across the meadows in the direction of the church.

Dally Watlock had not gambolled about the old sexton's knees as a child for nothing. She had been with the old man constantly, and been furnished by him with strange playthings in her time. To wit, there was a bag of buttons that had afforded her endless amusement, some being black, others silvered, while a certain portion were of superior make and richly gilt. Moredock called them buttons, but their shapes were peculiar, and looked as if they had been driven into the material to which they had been attached, instead of sewn. There were some ornaments, too, of stamped metal which had always been great favourites with Dally, from the fact of their containing the plump faces of baby boys with curly hair and wings.

Dally had many a time sat perched upon a tombstone and eaten apples while "gran'fa" dug graves, and the sight of the old man

growing lower and lower as he dug, till from being buried to his knees he went down to his waist, to his chest, and then quite out of sight, was always full of fascination for the child.

As a natural result, the church had been a familiar playground on Saturdays, when, as the old man dusted and arranged cushions and hassocks, Dally would have scandalised a looker-on, for she played at visiting, treating the pews as houses, the aisles of the church as streets, and made calls after duly knocking at all the pew doors, the knocker being temporary in every case, and formed of a large, old, tarnished gilt coffin-handle, which she held up with her left chubby fingers while she knocked with the right.

Moredock used to grin and enjoy it, petting the child, and humouring her in every way. She would be his companion in the belfry when he tolled or chimed the bells, and was even allowed to take a pull at one of the ropes, while they had often afforded her opportunities for a swing.

Dally Watlock, then, in earlier life had

stolen away from home as often as possible, and was as familiar with the church roof, tower, and interior, as her grandfather; hence, on the night when she stole out of the Rectory and ran across the meadows, she had no difficulty in the way of the plan she had designed, which was to reach the old lych-gate, try whether it was locked, and, if so, climb it.

It was locked, and she clambered over quickly and silently, took a short cut among the graves to the old railed tomb, close to the big buttress by the centre south window that had once contained stained glass. Here the smaller casement used for ventilation readily opened at the insertion of the blade of a pocket-knife, leaving room for the active girl, who had reached it by climbing up and standing upon the tomb railings, to pass through and lower herself into the dark interior of the church.

Here, standing upon the cushions of one of the primitive old square pews, she crouched and listened breathlessly; but all was still, and after satisfying herself as far as she

could that she was alone, she slipped down, passed through the door into the aisle, and then on and on, bent almost double, so as to keep below the level of the pew tops, where the darkness was intense.

The girl's every movement was as lithe and stealthy as that of some wild animal; always on the alert for danger and ready for instant flight; but there seemed to be no cause for fear, and she crept on and on till the rood-screen was reached, and she passed into the chancel, where she soon lay down by the ornamental railings of the Candlish tomb, between it and the oak panels of that family's pew, where there was an interval quite large enough to hide her compact little frame.

It was not so dark here, for a faint twilight streamed in through the great east window; but still the gloom was too deep for any one who passed to be recognisable.

Dally listened, and still crouched there, with her heart beating fast and her keen eyes roving from place to place as her ears strove to catch the faintest sound. The two

grotesque effigies of the Candlishes reclined just above her head, the tablets on the walls faintly shimmered, and a dark mass—the pulpit—loomed up beyond the rood-screen, and all was so still that her breath sounded to her laboured, and as if passing through rustling paper.

After carefully scrutinising the place in all directions, she fixed her eyes upon the dark patch with pointed top which represented the way into the vestry. It was just opposite to her, and seemed to be the great object of her nocturnal journey.

For a few minutes all was still. Then there was a faint chirruping noise which emanated from Dally's lips, as she backed softly a little more into her hiding-place.

No response!

She chirruped again, and failing to obtain any reply, she made a quick motion with one hand, the result being a sharp rap as if a tiny stone had struck the vestry door to make a second sound as it fell upon the stone floor.

No response!

"Safe!" whispered Dally to herself, and making a faint rustling sound, she glided out from her hiding-place, and crossing the chancel, raised the heavy latch of the vestry door.

There was a faint *click* as she passed in and closed it after her. Then another rustling sound, and a peculiar rattling noise, for Dally had drawn the large key she had borrowed from the sexton's cottage, placed it in the lock of the spiral staircase leading up to the rood-loft, opened it, and after withdrawing and inserting the key on the inner side, she crept in, locked the door, went rapidly up to the opening where she had sat during the funeral service, and then resting her arms upon the carved stone tracery, she thrust her head and shoulders as far forward as she could, and listened and waited for what was to come.

CHAPTER IX.

WATCHERS.

The old church at Duke's Hampton, a fine old structure, built in the latter part of the thirteenth century, stood calm and still upon its eminence that dark night. The older folks at the village said it was terribly haunted "arter dark," and the younger believed. Strange sights and sounds were said to have been seen and heard. Ghostly forms glided on silent wing round the tower and swept low amongst the tombs, uttering weird shrieks. Curious mutterings and croaks were heard on high among the corbels and demoniacal gargoyles, the holes in the tower among the ivy, and low moans often proceeded from the shuttered windows where the big bells hung.

All true, for down there in leafy Warwickshire there were plenty of owls, daws, starlings, and pigeons to make the old ivy-clothed building a bird sanctuary where they were never touched. They seemed to belong to "my church;" to Moredock; and he never took nest or destroyed their young.

On the night when Dally Watlock took upon herself to watch, high up in the rood-loft, steps approached the church from the back, about half an hour later, and a dark figure entered the churchyard, to walk cautiously and silently up towards the outer door of the vestry.

As it silently crossed the yard, a head slowly appeared above the wall, and watched the tall dark figure for a few minutes, as it seemed to glide in and out among the tombstones, and then fade completely away.

The watcher held on by the churchyard wall for a few minutes, rigid and paralysed. There was a faint sound of breathing heard, but it was catching and spasmodic, as if the watcher were in pain. But at last, after gazing in the direction where the dark figure

had disappeared, with starting eyes, and a sensation on the top of the head as if the cap there was being softly lifted, the gentleman of inquiring mind tried to wrench his hands from where they clutched the top of the wall.

It was a momentary act, resulting in his grasping the coping-stone more tightly, and uttering the words:

"Ha mussy upon us!"

For Joe Chegg felt his legs give way at the knees, and that he was bathed in a cold perspiration.

"If I can only get back safe home again," he moaned to himself, "never no more—never no more!"

He felt that he had gazed for the first time at one of the peripatetic horrors of which he had heard since he was a child, and in which he had always religiously believed. In fact, he would never have ventured to the churchyard at midnight had he not been moved by one of the strongest passions of our nature. He had gone there most fully convinced that somewhere about he would encounter

the gentleman who met Dally Watlock; and to emphasize their meeting, he had brought his smallest mallet from his tool-basket, as being a handy kind of tool.

But he had not reckoned upon seeing a tall dark figure draped in a long black cloak glide silently by him, growing taller and taller as it disappeared, leaving him with his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth, and without the wit to consider that where he stood in the meadow he was in the dry ditch, that the churchyard wall formed a kind of haha at that spot by the rise of the earth resulting from centuries of interments; and that, in addition, there was a steep slope up to the church, sufficient to make any one standing by the vestry door ten feet above his head.

But Joe Chegg would not have believed these simple physical facts had they been explained to him. He had seen a veritable spirit that might mean his own "fetch." Whether or no, he wanted to go home and keep his own counsel, mentally vowing—as he at last wrenched himself away, and ran as

hard as he could over the dewy grass—that, come what might, he would, if he were spared, never run such a risk again.

He was in the act of dragging himself away, thankful that he was on the meadow side of the wall, when a low muttering moan rose upon the night air, from the direction in which the monstrous figure had disappeared; and that moan acted as a spur to the frightened man.

It was simple enough, as simple as the explanation of other supernatural sounds, for as the dark figure stood close to the vestry door for a few moments and at last uttered an impatient "tut-tut-tut," there was a grumbling, muttering sound from a horizontal stone, and Moredock rose, saying in a low voice:

"All right, doctor—all right. I was half asleep, and didn't hear you come."

The next moment they had entered the Candlish vault, and the door was closed, Moredock directly after proceeding to strike a match.

"How much longer's this a-going on?" he grumbled.

"Till I have finished,' said the doctor sternly; but there was a strange intonation of the voice—a peculiar manner—which made the sexton, as he struck the light and held it to the candle in his lanthorn, gaze sharply at the speaker.

"All right, doctor. I don't grumble; you'll give me my dose again — seems to settle and comfort a man while he's waiting."

"Yes, yes, of course," said North hastily.

"You can rouse me up if I drop off to sleep, doctor. Couldn't get my nap i' the chair 'safternoon, and it makes a man a bit drowsy."

North lit his lamp, which stood ready upon the stone table, and the yellow light filled the grim place with its soft glow once more—a pleasantly subdued light which displayed the surrounding niches and the empty coffin of the late squire, and shone softly upon gilt plate, handle, and tarnished nail,

but lay in an intense ring of brightness upon the table that bore it and the sawdust around.

The customary portion from the flask was poured out, and swallowed by the old sexton with a satisfied smack of the lips before he set down the glass upon a coffin lid.

"Ha! that's fine, doctor," he said with a loud laugh, as his countenance puckered into a goblin grin. "Cordial that is. Goes down into a man's toes and the tips of his fingers, and makes his heart beat. You're a clever one, doctor—a clever one, that you are. Rouse me up if you want me. I may go to sleep again—I may go to sleep."

"Yes, yes, I'll call you," said North, as the old man seated himself once more in his corner with head against the wall, while before the doctor had settled the shade of his lamp to his satisfaction, a stertorous snore came from Moredock's corner, accompanied at intervals by a low moaning gasp.

"How easy to produce death!" said North, in a low voice. "Science gives us the power

to cause that and sleep, which is its semblance, at our will. Why should it be more difficult to produce life?"

"How many nights is this?" he continued. "Ten, and I seem no nearer—nay, further away, for — ah!" he ejaculated savagely, "there is that wretched coward shrinking again."

He shivered and looked hastily round as he drew in his breath hard and with a curious catch.

"Good heavens! of what am I afraid? The first amputator, the first explorer into Nature's hidden paths, where she guards her secrets so religiously—they only felt the same. Have I gone so far only to hesitate to go further?"

He stood shrinking, with his hand clutching the white cloth spread over the table, and his eyes fixed on vacancy.

"Am I—an experienced medical man—to be frightened by a shadow? I say that there is nothing wrong in my researches," he cried passionately, as if addressing some one in the corner of the vault. "It is for the benefit of

posterity. My experiments upon this vile body here are right.

"And yet I feel as if I cannot go further," he muttered, with the same abject shiver attacking him again; "as if I dared not—as if I must pause, and I have learned so much. I dare not! It is as if the hand of one's guardian angel were laid upon my breast, and a voice whispered—'Rash man, pause before it is too late!'"

He caught at the nearest object for support, for he was weak with excitement, and his face looked ghastly in the gloom, as he stood there trembling till he realised what he, the living, had seized to sustain him—a coffin handle—and snatched his fingers away with a cry of horror, to shrink back and rest against the further side of the vault, but only to start away again, for his shoulder was against another coffin.

He glanced at Moredock, but the old man was sleeping heavily, and once more he looked wildly round the vault.

"I cannot go on," he groaned; "it is too horrible. There is a terror beyond that dark

veil which seems to hold me back. I'll wake him up. This night shall end it all, and I'll rest in peace, contented with what I know. I dare go no further."

He drew a long breath, as if relieved, and felt stimulated by his thoughts. It was all so simple to try and leave everything as nearly as possible in its old state, generously recompense the old sexton, and return to his regular course. The proceedings of the past would be the joint secret of Moredock and himself.

"I've done," he said. "I'll be satisfied. It is too horrible to go on."

He crossed to the old man, who was now sleeping quite peacefully, and had raised his hand to shake him and bid him rise and help, but his hand stopped within a few inches of the old sexton's shoulder, and he stepped back with an ejaculation full of anger.

"Coward! idiot!" he exclaimed. "That ignorant old boor sleeps as calmly as a child among these grisly relics of mortality, and you, enlightened by science, educated, a seeker

after wisdom, shrink and shiver and dare do no more.

"No," he added, after a pause; "it is too horrible. There is a something holds me back.

"And fame—the praise of men? And love? The kisses of Leo? Her bright looks —her pride in the man she will call husband? Horace North, are you going mad? Pause? Now? When there is triumph waiting, and a little further research will teach me all I want — maybe give me the great success?

"No; not if fifty guardian angels barred my way. I will win now in spite of all."

The coward fit of shrinking had gone, and, with a laugh full of contempt for himself, he took a step to the table and snatched the white cloth from the great stone slab.

CHAPTER X.

A FRIENDLY VISIT.

A WEEK had passed since Horace North's struggle with the strange fits of repugnance and dread that had assailed him on his researches: six nights, during each of which he had battled with the same feelings and mastered, and gone on, with Moredock revelling in his opiate-produced sleep in the corner.

Night after night the old man slept in that vault for hours, among the remains of the Candlishes whom he had robbed, and enjoying a voluptuous pleasure in his sleep, which made him the doctor's willing servant, whose dread was lest the visits to the mausoleum should come to an end.

But these nightly visits were not without their effects, and these intense studies could not be carried on without leaving their traces on the man.

Mrs. Berens was taken ill, and the doctor was called in.

In her lonely widowed state, with nothing but her money, her dress, her mirror, and the visits and gossip of Duke's Hampton to amuse her, thirsting the while for the communings of a kindred spirit who would tell her she was far too young yet to give up thoughts of love, Mrs. Berens felt that she must have some relaxation, and she took it in the form of fits of illness of the body and ditto ditto of the mind.

For the former she called in Dr. North, and told her pains.

For the latter, the Reverend Hartley Salis, to whom she recounted her doubts, her sorrows, and her sufferings of mind; and in each case she felt better, though she did not take the medicine of the one nor follow out the precepts of the other.

It was very wrong, no doubt, but it was

very natural; and Mrs. Berens, not middle-aged, and plump, and pleasing, and anxious to please, was very full of human nature.

There was such satisfaction, too, in having her hand held by the doctor. So there was, too, when it was grasped at coming, and again at leaving, by bluff, manly Parson Salis; but they neither of them proposed, or went a step further than to be gently courteous and kind to the loving and lovable weak woman, who longed to empty the urn of her affection upon either head.

And now poor Mrs. Berens was in sad trouble.

"I know it," she sobbed to herself, after a visit from the doctor. "Mary Salis will not confess, and Leo always holds one off; but he does love Leo, and she is holding him in her wicked chains, like one of those terrible witches we read about; and, poor dear man, she is breaking his heart. I've tried so hard to wean him from that dreadful love of a bad, base girl, and the more I try the worse he is."

Mrs. Berens sobbed till her eyes ached,

and she bathed them with eau-de-cologne and water.

"How dare I say she is bad and base?" she said half aloud, speaking to herself in the glass, as her handsome, large, blue swimming eyes looked appealingly at her; "because I know it. I'm sure of it. I can always feel it. I'm weak and foolish, but I should love him and cherish him, while she is trifling with him—I'm sure—and breaking his heart.

"Oh, poor man, poor man!" she sighed; "how worn-out and ill he looks! What shall I do? What shall I do?"

Mrs. Berens made up her mind what she would do. She could not send for the curate. She was not sufficiently ill for that.

"And it would look so."

She could not go and see him, for that would also "look so." Leo detested her, she knew, quite as much as she detested Leo, whom she declared to be so horribly young. But she could go and see poor Mary; and after well bathing her eyes, she stripped her little conservatory to get a good bunch

of flowers for the invalid, and then went across to the Rectory.

Leo was out for a ride, to Mrs. Berens' great delight.

"Master's in his study over his sermon, ma'am," said Dally Watlock; "but Miss Mary's in, ma'am."

"Yes, Dally, it is Miss Mary I want to see," sighed Mrs. Berens; and then, as much out of genuine kindness as with the idea of making a friend at the Rectory: "How pretty, and young, and well you do look, Dally!"

"Thank ye, ma'am," said Dally, with a distant bob, but gratified all the same.

"Do you know, Dally, I've got a silk dress, a pale red, that would make up so nicely for you? It isn't old, but I shall not wear it any more."

Dally's eyes sparkled at pale red silk.

"It wouldn't fit you," continued the widow, "but you could make it up nicely with your clever little fingers;" and she compared her own redundant charms with the trim, tight little figure of the maid.

"Thank ye, ma'am. May I come for it?"

"Yes, Dally, do. Now show me in to Miss Mary."

Dally ushered in the widow, and then stood in the passage thinking.

"I wouldn't go for it, that I wouldn't, if I was quite sure. I don't want to wear her old dresses. Nice thing for a lady who's going to have a title and live up at the Hall to have to wear somebody else's old silk frocks.

"I think I'll go, though," said Dally. "No, I won't, for it's coming to a nice blow up for some one I know, and I'll let 'em all see."

"Ah, my dear," said Mrs. Berens, entering the room, flower-bearing, and bending down over the invalid with a good deal of gushing sentiment, but plenty of genuine affection.

"It's very good of you to come, Mrs. Berens," cried Mary, flushing. "And the flowers—for me?"

"For you? Yes," said the widow, plumping down on her knees by Mary's couch, and

playfully laying the bouquet upon Mary's bosom, and holding it there beneath her chin. "Now it's perfect. It only wanted your sweet rose of a face added to it. My dear, what an angel's face you have!"

"Mrs. Berens!" cried Mary, flushing more deeply, half annoyed, half amused at her visitor's flattering words; but there was no feeling anything but pleasure at the affectionate kiss pressed upon her lips, and the tender touches of the two well-gloved hands.

"There, I've come to have a quiet chat with you," said the widow. "I ought to have been in before, but I have been so unwell, my dear; obliged to send for Dr. North."

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. Berens," said Mary, laying her hand in those of the widow.

"I knew you would be, dear; and, oh, I have been so poorly."

"But you are better now?" said Mary kindly.

"No, no, my dear. I'm a poor, weak, unhappy woman, and — oh! I ought to be

ashamed of myself, that I ought, to go on like that when there you are so ill and yet so patient that one never hears a murmur escape your lips."

"I don't think I'm very ill, Mrs. Berens."

"Then I do, my dear; and I shall come and see you more often, for you've done me no end of good. It's like a lesson to me, and I'll never complain any more."

"That's right," said Mary, smiling. "Do come oftener; I'm very much alone. We will not talk about our ailments," she added with a smile.

"No, of course not; but I have been very poorly, dear, and I sent for Dr. North. Do you take any interest in Dr. North?"

Mrs. Berens was not subtle enough of intellect to note the change in Mary's countenance. At first there was a faint flush; then a waxen pallor; but she mastered her emotion, though her heart beat heavily as she said:

"Of course. He was very good and kind to me all through my illness."

"Yes, poor man—poor, dear man!" sighed the widow. "And of course Mr. Salis likes him very much?"

"Yes; they are very warm friends," said Mary quietly.

"Then do—do pray talk to your brother," cried Mrs. Berens, with pathetic eagerness.

"No, no, Mrs. Berens," said a bluff, deep voice. "I'm always with my sisters, and they talk to me too much."

"Oh, Mr. Salis! You shouldn't, you know," cried the widow, all of a flutter. "You shouldn't come in so suddenly."

"Why, I only came in to say 'how do?'" replied Salis pleasantly, as he shook hands. "There, sit down again, and tell me what I am to be talked to about."

"Oh, really, Mr. Salis, I—I—I was only going to say, pray talk to or see to poor Dr. North. I'm afraid he's very far from well."

"So am I," cried Salis. "I have just been telling him so."

"He — he has been here, then — just now?"

"Not exactly just now; I mean this morning. You noticed, then, that he seemed ill and over-excited?"

"Oh, yes," cried Mrs. Berens, as Mary tried to lie back perfectly calm, but with her eyes glancing rapidly from one to the other, and her trembling fingers telling the agitation from which she suffered. "I was so poorly that I sent for him, and he quite startled me: his manner was so strange and abrupt. I'm sure he's being worried over something."

"Studies too hard," said Salis quietly. "He will do it, and advice is of no avail. Mrs. Milt tells me that he sits up at night. Doctors are like clergymen, I'm afraid, Mrs. Berens: they are fond of teaching and curing other people, but they neglect themselves."

"There, I hope you will give him a good talking to, Mr. Salis," said the widow, rising to go; "for I should really not like to ask him to see me again until he is better. He seemed to be so wild and eccentric: he quite startled me."

"Just for the sake of saying something, Mary," said the curate as soon as they were alone; and, in answer to Mary's inquiring eyes, "Horace has made up his mind to distinguish himself for Leo's sake, and, heigho! my dear, things seem to be very awkward, and I don't know how to set them right."

CHAPTER XI.

AN INTERRUPTION.

Other people, too, noticed the doctor's strangely intent manner, as he went hurriedly about among his patients every morning, and then returned to his study to pore over sundry manuscript notes and refer to certain books.

Mrs. Milt had to almost insist upon his taking his meals, for on two occasions his dinner had gone out untasted, and she had found him sitting, with his head resting upon his hands, deep in thought.

He started upon being spoken to, and seemed once more himself; but as soon as he was alone again, he relapsed into another fit of abstraction.

A few more days passed, and his task was telling upon him terribly ; but he persevered, for each night he felt that he was getting nearer to success.

"I shall succeed," he said to himself, with a wild excitability of manner that was startling ; but he was alone when he said these words, and no one heard them.

"Arn't it a very long experiment, doctor ?" said Moredock, one night, looking at the doctor seriously, and rubbing his cheek slowly.

"Yes. It is taking me longer than I thought, but I shall soon finish now."

"Glad o' that," said the old man drily ; "because a pitcher as goes too often to the well, doctor, gets broke at last."

"What do you mean ?"

"Naught, only we might be found out."

"Nonsense !" said the doctor uneasily. "Nobody is likely to be about except any person should be ill, and I know exactly who is likely to want the doctor by night."

"Ah, well, let's be careful, doctor, for it would be awkward for both if we was to be found out."

"Pish! Who would find us out, man?"

"Well, say parson."

"Absurd! He is in bed, and sound asleep. There, take your glass; I want to begin."

"Nay," said the old man, looking at the rich liqueur North poured out for him, "I don't think I'll have no drop to-night."

"Nonsense, man!" said North, holding out the glass, at which the old man gazed longingly. But he shook his head and thrust it away.

"Nay, doctor; I'm going to keep watch to-night."

"Keep watch, man?" said North, who seemed staggered at this determination.

"Yes, doctor, I'm going to keep watch. I can't afford to have aught go wrong, if you can. You get on with your work, and I'll be on the look-out."

"Here?"

"Nay, nay. I'll hang about outside.'

"Yes, do," said North, who seemed relieved; and he turned down the lamp to let Moredock out.

"I shall give three taps on the door, doctor, when I come back," whispered the old man. "You go on just as if I was here; but when I tap, you turn down the light again, and let me in. Don't s'pose I shall see anybody, but I must take care."

"Yes, do," said North hurriedly; and, as the old man passed out, he closed the door after him and made it fast.

"It would have been like checking my experiment now I am so near success," he said to himself, as, now quite alone, he once more turned up the shaded lamp, when the warm yellow glow shone out full upon the recumbent figure, carefully draped with the great white sheet.

Horace North stood bending over the subject of his ghastly experiment, the remains of Luke Candlish lying apparently unchanged, and as if decay had been completely arrested.

There was a strange odour of chemicals in the place, and, as the doctor removed the cloth, it was to uncover, just as they had been left on the previous night, a powerful

galvanic battery, syringes, and other surgical paraphernalia.

For the next hour the doctor continued his labours, feeling more and more assured that he should triumph; and, as he toiled on, he talked rapidly to himself of the apparently complete arrest of decay, and the perfectly calm manner in which his subject lay, as it were, placidly waiting for the awakening which North felt, in his excitement, absolutely sure would come.

"It is so near now that I have but to vitalise and obtain positive proof that, when carried to its full extent, I have performed what is almost a miracle, and proved that what I worked out in theory is possible in practice."

He stood gazing down at the calm, cold face, with its closed eyes, hesitating, not from the horror that had half paralysed him before, but from dread lest, now he had gone so far that he could apply his final test, he should be disappointed.

His head burned, his pulses throbbed heavily, and his hesitation increased.

Rousing himself at last, he laid his hand upon the icy-cold forehead before him, the contact sending a chill through his frame; but he did not notice it.

"Why do I stop?" he said. "It only wants this. I am alone, and no better opportunity could come. Oh, if I had but the aiding hand of that old *savant*, how easy it would be!"

This brought back the scene in the theatre—the lecture, the applause; and his heart beat more rapidly in anticipation of his grand triumph when he could demonstrate this, the greatest surgical feat that had ever been performed.

"And yet I hesitate," he exclaimed excitedly; "hesitate when I have but to plunge boldly to succeed."

"And I will," he said firmly, after a pause.

The scene which followed was weird and horrible, had there been an onlooker; to North it had all the fascination of an intense scientific experiment. For he had arrived at the pitch when, according to his theory,

he had but to make the warm living blood pass from his own veins, as in a case of transfusion, to prove that his studies bore the fruit of success.

The preliminaries were all arranged, and, with a sigh of satisfaction, North took a bright, keen lancet from its case, but only to let it fall back, starting violently, for he was, as it were, snatched back from his scientific dream by a faint rap upon the door of the great vault, and this was followed directly after by two more.

North rapidly replaced the great sheet, and turned down the light before going softly to the entry.

"Well?" he said harshly; "returned?"

"Hist!" whispered the old sexton. "Out here!"

He caught the doctor's hand and drew him out from the entry of the vault to stand within the iron railings.

"Why have——"

"Hist!" whispered the old man again. "Come with me."

North hesitated again, but yielded to his companion and followed him softly right round the church to the belfry door, which yielded to the old man's touch.

"What does this mean?" said the doctor angrily. "Why have you brought me here?"

"Come and see," whispered the old man so earnestly that North hesitated no longer, but followed him wonderingly into the church, and along the matting-covered aisle, to the old oak screen, where Moredock paused and caught his arm.

"Some one watching?" whispered North, as they stood together in the darkness; "in yonder?"

For the old man had indicated the vestry door with his outstretched hand.

It seemed strange, for a minute before they had been beside the outer door of the vestry, and now he had been brought in to stand by the inner door in the chancel.

"You're wanted there," whispered Moredock—"yonder!"

"Watchers?"

"You're wanted there, doctor," whispered the old man. "Go in and see."

The silence was painful in the extreme, as North stood wondering there, but the next moment, feeling attracted by he knew not what desire to see who was within there face to face, he took a couple of steps forward to the old oak door, when a faint whispering seemed to come from the other side, followed by a low cough, which sent the blood surging to his brain.

There was no hesitation now, for, half-mad with excitement and the strange passion that seemed for the moment to stifle him, he seized the great latch, which snapped loudly as he threw it up, and strode into the little stone-walled room.

CHAPTER XII.

DALLY'S APPEAL.

"NAY! nay! nay! I know what you want. There, give me my pipe," said Moredock, settling himself down in his big-armed Windsor chair.

"Yes, gran'fa, dear," cried Dally, bustling about and fetching the clay pipe with a clean white bowl, consequent upon its having been thoroughly burned in the fire before it was stood up in the corner on the hob. "There's your pipe, dear, and there's your tobacco box. Oh, how heavy it is!"

"It arn't heavy with 'bacco, lass. Should ha' thought a girl as I've brought up, as I've brought up you ever since your mother and

father died, would have give her poor old gaffer a pinch o' 'bacco now and agen."

"And so I will, gran'fa, dear," cried Dally, taking the lid off the heavy leaden pot. "Next time I go into town I'll bring you a beautiful packet of the best. Let me fill your pipe, dear, same as I used to."

"Ay, you was a good little gel then," said Moredock, as he watched the brown, plump fingers busily charging the bowl, while a grim smile puckered his face, and he lay back with a satisfied air.

"So I am now, gran'fa, dear."

"Nay; you've come to bother your poor old gran'fa about money for silk dresses, and feathers, and gloves. I know."

"No, you don't, gran'fa, dear," cried Dally. "There, now it's nice and full."

"You've jammed it in too tight."

"No, I haven't, gran'fa. I know exactly how you like it. There! hold still while I fetch you a light. There! there, then. Now pull. Don't you remember how you used to puff the smoke in my face and make me cough?"

"Ay; and I 'member how you tried to smoke my pipe, and how sick it made you."

"Yes, I remember," said Dally, clapping her hands. "Ah! how happy I used to be then with you, gran'fa! Do you remember how you used to take me to the church?"

"Ay," grunted the old man, puffing away, with a dreamy look in his face.

"And how you used to pretend to bury yourself in the graves when you were digging, so as to frighten me?"

"Ah!" grunted Moredock.

"Then there was that old skull, gran'fa, that I had to play with. What became of that skull?"

"Up in the cupboard in your old bedroom," grunted Moredock.

"How happy I used to be then!" sighed Dally, stroking a thin wisp off her grandfather's hideous old forehead.

"Ah, you was a good little gel then, and thought about your poor old gran'fa, and didn't come bothering him for money."

"Yes, I did, gran'fa—for sweeties," said Dally.

"Ay; but I wouldn't give you none, gel."

"Yes, you did sometimes, gran'fa; and so you would now to buy some nice things —a pretty bonnet—if I asked you."

"Nay, I wouldn't. And I knew it. You've come a-purpose to worry me out of some money."

"No, I haven't, gran'fa."

"Ay, but you have. I know. Look here, how's that going on? If it's going to be my leddy, you shall have as much as you want; but not without. Is he courting of you?"

"No, gran'fa."

"Whaaart?"

"Only sometimes, gran'fa; and that's what made me come to you."

"You—you haven't come for the brass?"

"No, gran'fa. I want you to help me, for I'm such a miserable little girl."

"What about?—what about?" cried the old man, smoking furiously, and staring with a peculiarly angry look at the girl.

"I wanted to tell you, gran'fa," cried

Dally, plumping herself down at the old man's feet, and laying her rosy cheek upon his corduroy-covered knee, stained with the clay from many a grave. "It's all such a muddle."

"What is?—what is?"

"Why, everything," cried Dally, with a petulant twitch; "but he's not going to play with me. He's told me many a time that he'd marry me, and make me Lady Candlish; and he shall, shan't he, gran'fa?"

"Ay, that he shall," cried the old man, patting Dally's curly head. "That's sperrit, that is. You keep him to it. But what's all a muddle?"

"Why, everything, gran'fa," cried Dally, bursting into tears, and speaking in an excited, passionate way. "But he shall marry me; and you'll help me make him, won't you, gran'fa?"

"Ay, that I will, my pretty. That's the way. Don't you be bet."

"I won't; and I won't have him come courting Leo Salis."

"Nay, you won't," said the old man,

smoking away as he patted the fierce little creature's head.

"He said it was all nonsense, and I believed him because he was so fond of me; but he courts her, too."

"Nay, does he, Dally?"

"Yes, gran'fa; and he shan't. He shall marry me. If he don't, I'll kill him!"

"So you shall, my pretty," chuckled the old man; "and I'll bury him. And then the doctor——"

He checked himself and chuckled again.

"What's the use of the doctor when he's dead?" cried Dally pettishly, as she tugged angrily at a fold of the old man's trousers. "And Doctor North's a fool!"

"Nay! nay! nay! Doctor's a very clever man, Dally."

"He isn't; he's a fool, gran'fa!"

"Tut, tut! Shoo, shoo!"

"I say he is, or he wouldn't be courting and making love to Miss Leo."

"Do he, Dally?—do he?"

"Why, yes, gran'fa, of course he does; and she's carrying on all the time with Tom.

Oh, how I do hate her! Wish he'd let her die!"

"Ay, would ha' been a good job for everybody—and for me, Dally. But doctor don't know?"

"Know? Of course not. He's too stupid. He's a fool!"

"Nay, he's not a fool," said the old man, smoking rapidly. "Doctor's head's screwed on right way. He don't know, or——"

"Or what, gran'fa—or what?"

"He! he! he!" chuckled the old man, as Dally screwed herself round and gazed eagerly in his face. "Here, gently, gently! Don't stick your little claws into my legs like that, pussy."

"But what, gran'fa, what?—what would the doctor do?"

"Give him a nasty dose, I should say, Dally," chuckled the old man. "Doctor don't know—he arn't no fool. Does Miss Leo know young squire courts you?"

"I don't know," cried Dally thoughtfully.

"She be a bad 'un," grunted the old man.

"She's a wretch, and I hate her! Oh, I wish master was the doctor instead of the parson!"

"Why, Dally, my lass?" said the old man, whose lips were drawn open to a terrible extension—a savage grin—as if he gloried in the display of fierce vindictive spite which the girl displayed.

"I'd get something out of the surgery and poison her!"

"Nay, nay, Dally, that wouldn't do," he chuckled. "They'd find you out and hang you."

"I wouldn't care if I killed her first," said Dally fiercely. "She shouldn't have him."

"What—the doctor?"

"No. Don't be so stupid. You know—Tom."

"Ah, well, wait a bit. Dessay the things 'll come right. Wait till doctor finds it out; he'll half kill Tom Candlish, same as Parson Salis did when squire was after Miss Leo."

"Did he? Oh, I know. It was when master's knuckles was all cut."

"That's right, Dally. I was in the wood and see it all, but I never said a word till now. And don't you. I thought it was all over between young Tom and pretty Miss up at the Rect'ry."

"But it isn't all over, gran'fa, and I won't have it. They shan't meet. I'll tear her eyes out first. Nice one she is to lecture me!"

"You wait till doctor finds it out, if he's courting Leo Salis. He'll half kill Tom Candlish."

"But I don't want him half killed," cried Dally. "Yes I do; it'll bring him to his senses, and when he's ill I can go and give him a bit of my mind."

"Ah, to be sure; so you can, my pretty."

"I'll let him know. He shall marry me, that he shall."

"Ay, so he shall, Dally."

"And you'll help me, gran'fa?"

"Of course I will, my pretty."

"Then I'll tell you what I came to say."

"Wasn't it for money, then?"

"Money? No. A girl with a face like mine don't want money, and I shall have plenty when I'm up at the Hall."

"Toe be sure, Dally. Toe be sure. Ay, but you are a clever gel!"

"Then, look here, gran'fa, you'll help me to make doctor give Tom Candlish a big thrashing."

"Ay, if I can. I should like it. He threatened me wi' his whip t'other day 'cause I said the sheep mustn't come in th' churchyard. Parson May found fault, and Squire ca'd me an old mummy, and said he'd put in pigs if he liked. I'd like to see doctor mummying him, same as he does his brother—eh; help you, lass?"

"Yes; but it wasn't the doctor, it was master made a mummy of Squire Tom. You're mixing 'em up."

"Ay, I s'pose I am, Dally; but I'm not very old yet."

"Then you'll help me, gran'fa?"

"Will it help you to get to be my lady at the Hall?" said the old man dubiously.

"Of course, gran'fa, or I wouldn't do it,"

said the girl, who had wrenched herself round, kneeling at the old man's feet, and resting her elbows on his knees, her little dimpled chin upon her hands.

"What do you want me to do, then?"

"I want you to help me serve them out."

"Ay, and how?"

"I want doctor to find out that Leo Salis is a down bad one."

"Ay, she is, my lass; and not good enough for him."

"And I want the doctor to beat Tom Candlish and stop him from going after Leo Salis, and then he'd come altogether to me."

"Ay, that's right, Dally; that's right. I want to see thee my leddy up at the Hall."

"Then, look here: you take the doctor some night, and show him when Leo—ugh! how I hate the minx!—is along with my Tom."

"Ay, but how, lass, how?"

"I'll tell you, gran'fa," whispered Dally vindictively. "Master ordered Squire Tom never to come to the Rectory again."

"Ay."

"So he gave me notes to take to Miss Leo."

"And you was fool enough to take 'em?"

"Yes, gran'fa; but that's how it began with me, and he soon told me he didn't care for her, and that he only wrote to Leo so as to make her send me out with notes to him, so that we could court."

"Oh! He's a nice 'un," growled Moredock. "He allus was. Well?"

"And now Tom's fooling me and meets Leo, and they court, and I dare say they laugh at me," cried Dally vindictively.

"I dessay; but you'll make him marry you, Dally."

"I will, gran'fa. Now listen: because Tom can't come to the Rectory, and Leo can't go to him because master watches her, they meet of a night."

"Nay. Tchah!"

"They do, gran'fa."

"What? Does he come to the Rect'ry o' nights?"

"No. She waits till every one's asleep, and then she goes to him."

"Nay, do she, lass?" cried the old man.

"Yes, gran'fa. She gets out of her bedroom window, and down on to the summer-house, and then goes."

"How do you know?"

"Because I've seen her out of my window, gran'fa, night after night; and then she runs down the green path to the meadows, and——"

"Meets him there?"

"No," said Dally, shaking her head.

"Where does she go, then?"

"Can't you guess, gran'fa?"

"Nay. Yes. Up to the Hall."

"Where the servants would find it out? No; they're too cunning for that."

"Where then?" cried the old man, chuckling, and evidently enjoying it all.

"Why, to a place where nobody would go of a night—where it would all be quiet and still, and people would be afraid to walk for fear of seeing ghosts. Where would that be, gran'fa?"

Old Moredock's jaw dropped, and he gazed down at his grandchild in a startled way.

"Not to the old morslem?" he whispered, in an awe-stricken tone.

"Pooh! No; but next door to it."

"Not to my church, gel?"

"Not quite, gran'fa; but to the vestry."

"What?"

"Yes, gran'fa," whispered Dally excitedly. "Leo Salis gets out of the window and goes straight to the vestry, and meets Tom Candlish there night after night."

"And she gets parson's keys, and goes in at the south door, and through the porch, and 'long the south aisle, and then across to the chancel?"

"Yes, gran'fa, with a great veil all over her head; but how did you know?"

"Why, you're telling me, arn't you?" said the old man testily, as he recalled the draped head he had seen hastily gliding above the pews. "And Squire Tom?"

"He goes across the meadows and over

the churchyard wall, and in at the vestry door by the big vault."

"Does he, though?" said Moredock, with his jaw dropped still more; "and how does he get the keys?—of course, he's churchwarden! Hah! nice game in my church! Tchah!" he cried, after a pause. "Stuff! You dreamt it."

"Oh, no, I didn't," said Dally. "I watched her, and saw her go. And another night I watched and followed, and I saw a man go up to the Candlish vault."

"Eh! You saw that?" cried the old man, catching the girl's arm.

She nodded.

"Who was it, eh? Not me?"

"You? No, gran'fa!"

"Nor the doctor?"

"The doctor? No! It was my Tom Candlish!"

"Are you sure, gel?"

"I am now, gran'fa; I wasn't then. I half thought it was the doctor, and I did hope it was him. It was so dark, I couldn't quite

be sure; and he stopped by the gate in the iron railings and looked about so that I daren't go and make sure."

"Phew!" whistled the old man, dropping his pipe and wiping his brow as the fragile stem broke into atoms. "And you there, Dally, watching?"

"Yes, gran'fa; for I was, oh, so jealous!"

"And you're not sure now?"

"Yes I am, gran'fa; for I made sure."

"You went again—in the middle of the night?"

"Yes, gran'fa. I got out of my bedroom window next time and went first."

"And you saw them go. Did you see——?"

The old man stopped short.

"No, I didn't see much, gran'fa; but I heard. I went into the church."

"How did you get in?"

"Through one of the lead windows, as I've often climbed through when I was a little girl; and then went into the vestry and up the screw stairs, and into the little place in the loft."

"How did you get the key?"

"How did I get the key? Why, I came and took it from here."

"You jade."

"And you came and caught me."

"Did you take anything else?"

"No, gran'fa, of course not," cried the girl. "I was obliged to do it. Then I waited till I could just see Leo Salis come in along the church, and she passed under me and went into the vestry."

"Sure?"

"Sure? Of course I am; and then I stole down the screw stairs and waited by the door till I heard him come in from the churchyard."

"And me about there in the morslem all the time!" muttered Moredock. "Well," he added aloud, "was it young Squire Tom?"

"Yes, gran'fa; it was him, safe enough, and it was Leo Salis, and she scolded him for being so late, and they stopped together for ever so long; him smoking."

"Smoking?"

"Yes; I heard him strike a match, and I could smell it—a wretch!"

"And I thought it was the parson," said Moredock, chuckling.

"They stayed there two hours, gran'fa; and they go regular, and I had to wait till they'd gone before I could go back."

"And weren't you afraid, Dally?" said the old man with a grin.

"'Fraid! What of?" said the girl. "I wasn't afraid, but I felt as if I could have killed them both."

"Ay, you must, my pretty. And now what do you mean me to do?"

"Do? Take the doctor there, and let him find Leo out, and beat Tom. It'll stop it all, and serve him right. You will, won't you, gran'fa?"

"Ay, lass, I will."

"You good old, darling old gran'fa; and—look—look!"

The old man's eyes caught sight of a face at the lattice window at the same moment; and almost before she had spoken, Moredock had caught up the heavy leaden tobacco jar,

and hurled it with so good an aim that it went out through the diamond panes with a loud crash.

Dally stood in the fire-lit room half paralysed; but the old man had hobbled to the door, and gazed out in the darkness for a few moments, listening to the sound of retreating feet.

"Who was it, gran'fa?" whispered Dally.

"Well, I arn't quite sure," said the old man with asperity; "but I should say it was that Joe Chegg."

"And he heard all I said?"

"Nay, I shouldn't think he did; but I just give him warning if he comes spying and listening about my place, he'll get it with the maddick or the spade."

"I don't think he came to spy, gran'fa."

"Then it was after you, and I won't have it."

"Never mind him, gran'fa," said Dally, with quiet confidence; "even if he did hear, I can silence him."

"No courtin', for I won't have it."

"Courting with him!" cried Dally scorn-

fully. "Don't be afraid that I shall do that, gran'fa! But you'll tell doctor?"

"Don't you be afraid, my gel."

"And when?"

"First chance I have," said the old man grimly; and then to himself: "He shan't call me a mummy for naught."

"Good night, gran'fa."

"Good night, my leddy," cried the old man, chuckling. "Don't you be skeered. I'll do it, and p'r'aps to-night."

CHAPTER XIII.

MOREDOCK KEEPS HIS WORD.

Old Moredock kept his word, for after leaving North alone to carry out his experiment, he went round the old church, proceeding cautiously from tombstone to tombstone, his red, watery eyes twinkling with excitement, till he reached the belfry door.

This yielded to the key he always carried, deep down in his old coat pocket, and passing through into the lower part of the tower, he continued his way by the low, arched doorway to the font.

Here he paused and listened, but all was perfectly still, and, running his hand along the tops of the pews, he went slowly on till he reached the screen, where he hesitated for

a few moments, and then uttering a low chuckle, that sounded like that of a cuckoo over a caterpillar feast, he turned aside, mounted the stairs, and seated himself in the pulpit, where he made himself comfortable with the big purple velvet cushion, and waited patiently for what was to come.

He had not to wait long, for as he sat, with his arms resting on the front of the oaken erection, his ears twitching, a familiar sound in the church porch warned him that some one was at hand.

Drawing in his breath he strained his eyes, and before long he had the satisfaction of seeing the matter-of-fact elucidation of the mystery which had shaken his well-hardened nerves, for though much less plainly seen, and from a different point of view, there was the draped head which had alarmed him passing before the pulpit, round into the chancel, and into the vestry, whose latch gave a slight click.

"Yes," he muttered; "doctor shall find you, and to-night, my lady. You don't stand between her and her rights."

He chuckled in anticipation of the scene that was to come, and, slowly descending from the pulpit, followed the figure till he was pretty close to the chancel door, but inside the rectory pew, over whose side he could listen as he knelt on the cushion of one of the seats, but quite ready to bob down into sheltering darkness should there be a risk of being seen.

Again he had not long to wait, for as he listened he heard the sound of a key in the outer door, the entering of some one, the withdrawal of the key, its insertion on the vestry side, and the locking of the door, followed by a low murmuring of voices.

"Pretty doves!" muttered the old sexton. "Coo away, sweet, soft critters! Mummy, am I, Squire Tom? Hideous old figure, am I, Miss Leo? Oh, you needn't deny it. You've told my Dally I was, scores of times. All right. He! he! he! Chilly place to make love. Dessay you'll catch colds, so I'll bring the doctor!"

He kept his word, and North had his hand upon the latch, while Moredock glee-

fully rubbed his hands in anticipation of a scene that should relieve some of the tedium of his existence, and advance his grandchild's ends, but quietly slipped away home.

"I'd like to see it," he said; "but there may be trouble, and I'm best away."

As if fate had determined that Horace North should be fully enlightened as to the character of the woman he worshipped, it so happened that as the door was thrown open, Tom Candlish was striking a flaming fusee.

The sharp crick—crick—crack of the explosive end overcame the sound made by the latch, and the match burst into a reddish blue flame, illuminating the whole place, for the young squire for the moment was too much taken aback to cast it down.

North uttered a hoarse groan as he gazed at the group before him: Tom Candlish seated in the curate's chair by the oaken table, and Leo upon his knee with her arm about his neck, and her head resting upon his shoulder, while seen by the lurid light there appeared to be a couple of clergymen,

one in black, the other in white, standing behind them in the background, as if to give sanction to their proceedings by performing some holy rite.

"The devil!" shouted Candlish, as Leo leaped from his lap, and crouched away in one corner of the vestry, her shame concealed by the sudden darkness that fell as Tom Candlish cast down the match.

"You scoundrel!" cried North, as, furious with rage, he dashed at the man whom he felt to have been the cause of his agonising pang.

For a moment he had turned towards where he had seen Leo shrink away, his eyes flashing as if he could have withered the wretched creature whom he had believed to be all that was good and true, but who, in spite of his passion for her, seemed now to be too base to be worthy even of a word.

He could not crush her. He could not assail her with the bitterness of the words which rushed to his lips. The veil had fallen from his eyes, and in that dire

moment, as he saw her hanging upon the neck of the brutal, coarse young squire, his doting love turned to a savage hate.

But he could not crush her; he could not strike her even with his contempt; but a fierce laugh escaped his throat as he felt how good and kind fate had been to him in giving him the opportunity for taking ample revenge.

And how sweet it seemed as he sprang in the dusk at Tom Candlish.

Fate was kind to him again for the moment, for, as if instinctively, North's hands caught the sturdy young giant in his fierce grip, and for a few moments they swayed here and there, striking against the wall, the simple furniture of the place, crashing against the closet where the registers were kept, and tearing down the surplice and gown to trample them on the floor.

"Are you mad, doctor?" panted Tom Candlish.

"Yes," came hissing through the doctor's teeth.

"Don't be a cursed fool. Recollect where you are."

"Recollect where I am!" cried North with a bitter laugh. "You say that to me, you sacrilegious hound!"

They swayed here and there again, North striving hard to get a hand free to strike a blow, but in vain; and the struggle was one savage wrestle, in which the weaker man seemed to be made the equal of the stronger by the passion in his breast.

Meanwhile Leo Salis, trembling in every limb, crouched in the dark far corner of the vestry, and half lay huddled up, listening to the fierce struggle, too much unnerved to move.

At last, though, the desire to escape—to make her way home—mastered all else, and she made for the nearest point of exit—the door into the churchyard; but though she passed her hand over it again and again, the key was not there. Tom Candlish had it in his pocket, and he was unable to set her free.

She tried to creep past the contending

couple to the chancel door, but as she strove for it, Tom Candlish was driven against her, nearly fell, and uttered a savage curse, which drowned her cry of agony, for he had crushed her delicate hand beneath his heel.

She shrank back into the corner again, sobbing with fear; but as the struggle continued she nerved herself once more, and this time rose to her feet and tried the other way, just as Tom Candlish was gaining the mastery, and swung North round so savagely that he struck the wretched girl, and drove her heavily against the wall.

Leo uttered a hoarse gasp, and stretched out her hands to save herself, when her left touched the oaken door leading into the chancel.

This revived her just as her feelings were overcoming her and she was turning faint.

With a quick motion she caught the latch, dragged it up, passed through the opening, and, closing the heavy oaken door, sped along the chancel and south aisle to the big door, unlatched it, and, hardly knowing what she did, passed into the porch,

and relocked the door before running down to the lych-gate, round to the meadows, and then breathlessly back to the Rectory garden.

"Safe!" she panted; "safe!" as she reached the rustic summer-house, and climbed rapidly up to gain her room, and, after softly closing the casement, sink down sobbing on the floor, bathed in perspiration, and with her breath coming in sobs. "That idiot will not dare to speak. I hope Tom will half kill him. What an escape! But no one will know."

At this thought she breathed more freely, in happy ignorance of the fact that Dally was just closing her window, gleefully hoping that there had been a scene.

That scene was over now, for as the big south door closed on Leo the struggle was at its fiercest, and Tom Candlish was getting the worst of the encounter.

"Loose my throat, North!" he cried. "So cursedly ungentlemanly."

"Yes; I am dealing with a scoundrel, whom Hartley Salis thrashed, and I'll thrash you too, you dog!"

As he spoke, he dealt with his now freed hand a fierce blow right between Tom Candlish's eyes, making him stagger back.

But the triumph was momentary, for, rendered savage by the pain, the young squire flung himself upon his adversary, and bore him back as a jingling of a falling key was heard. The wrestling grew wilder and fiercer, and then Horace North felt as if his legs were suddenly enmeshed. He strove to free them, but in vain; and before he could recover the ground he had lost he was flung heavily, his head coming with a crash upon the stone floor, just where the matting did not cover it, and he lay without motion, and made no sound.

"Curse him for a fool! Let him lie there till he comes to," panted Tom Candlish. "Where's the key? What a fool! I heard it fall as we struggled. Matches? They went too, and if they didn't I daren't light one."

He felt his way to the chancel door, but in his confusion he could not open it, as Leo had made it fast.

"She's got away home by now," muttered Candlish. "Where's my hat? All right; I put it on the window-ledge. Hah!—yes, that will do."

He stepped up on the oaken chest beneath the long, narrow window, opened the iron-framed casement, and, squeezing himself through, stood in a bent attitude, holding on for a few moments, and then leaped down into the black darkness.

A dull thud as he came down on the gravel, a crushing blow, followed by another rapidly given; a heavy groan, and then silence.

A minute later a rustling sound as of some one stealing away.

CHAPTER XIV.

"WHAT HAVE I DONE?"

"WHERE am I?"

No answer. All was pitchy dark, but a pleasant, cool air fanned the speaker's burning brow.

"Moredock! Are you asleep? The light's out. What's the matter? What's this cloth about my legs?"

There was a rustling sound as Horace North rose to his feet, dragged a fallen surplice from his feet, and began to feel about him in a confused way.

But that was a wall, not the ends of coffins; that was an overturned table, not the stone slab with its hideous burden; and that——

"Oh!"

Horace North reeled against the wall, and rested there as he uttered that piteous groan; for, like a flash of lightning, the ray of memory had shot into his darkened brain, and he saw once more the wretched idol he had worshipped gazing wildly at him with starting eyes—she, the woman he had set upon a pinnacle, grovelling before him in her shame! The moment before, the lady of his frank, honest love; the next moment revealed to him as low in mind, as degraded as some miserable rustic wench, ready to accept the kisses of the first man who called her "dear!"

"Am I going mad?" he groaned. "Poor Salis! Poor Mary Salis! They must never know. And poor me! Fool! blind idiot! But I loved her," he moaned; "and I thought her so sweet and pure and true—a woman for whom I would have shed my heart's best blood—a woman for whom I—— Pah! I must not stand puling here! Blood? Yes, blood! The brute! He's strong as a horse."

He took out a pocket-handkerchief,

doubled it, and roughly bandaged his head; for it was bleeding from a cut at the back.

"Clear my brain," he muttered; "I must not stand here. That place left open! Is Moredock there?"

He felt his way to the door; and, as he stepped cautiously along, his foot kicked against something which jingled on the tiled floor.

He felt about, touched the surplice which had been dragged down and entangled his legs; and, as he snatched it away, the key jingled once more, and he caught it up.

He opened and relocked the door after he had passed out, breathing more freely as he stood in the cool, dark night.

"Moredock!" he whispered. "Are you there?"

There was no reply, but he did not stir; for a curious feeling of confusion attacked him once more, and he put his hand to his head to try and master his thoughts.

"Yes," he muttered; "of course I must go and close that place up. Even if I go mad, that must not be known."

He took a few steps instinctively towards the vault, and fell over something in the path, contriving, however, to save himself, so that he only came down upon his hands and knees.

The shock acted like a spell, and brought back his wandering mind.

"Who's this?" he muttered. "Moredock?"

He passed his hands rapidly about the body before him, lying flat upon its back.

"Tom Candlish!" he ejaculated, as his hands came in contact, the one with a curiously-shaped breast-pin the young squire wore, the other with the bunch of charms and the locket he wore on his chain.

"Good heavens! What have I done? The man is dead!"

North started to his feet, trying hard to collect his wandering ideas, for he was at sea once more. He could not comprehend how Tom Candlish had contrived to get there, till he recalled the window, and at the same time recollected that he had struck at him again and again with all his might.

"Have I killed him?" he muttered; and, suffering still from the blow upon his head, his mental faculties seemed to be quite off their balance. The calm medical man, with his accurate judgment, was no longer there; but one full of wild excitement—one moment bubbling over with delirious joy at having triumphed over his enemy, of whom he had been madly jealous; the next, ready to shrink and tremble at the deed he had done.

He did not—he could not—pause to calculate how it had happened, beyond feeling that he must have beaten his enemy horribly, till he had in his last efforts struck him down, and then crawled out from the window to fall and die. He could not arrange all this in an orderly manner, for he was now seized with a frantic horror of discovery; and the question filled his mind, what was he—a murderer—to do?

Only one idea occurred to him, and that was the natural one that occurs to the most ignorant under the circumstances: he had slain this man, and the penalty was death for death. He did not know that he wanted

to live, the shock had been too horrible that night; but he must act—he must do something; and, yielding entirely to his impulses, he bent down, and, with a wonderful effort of nervous force, raised the fallen man, and stood thinking for a few moments.

Impulse moved him then; and, without further hesitation, he bore the body down the steps to the door of the mausoleum.

The door yielded to his pressure, and he stepped in with his load, the darkness proving no hindrance to him, for he knew the place so well that he could come and go without touching the sides for guidance.

He stood right in the middle of the place for a few moments, thinking; one brother hanging over his left shoulder, the other lying motionless upon that cold stone slab, as he had lain all through the series of experiments which had been tried.

"It is fate," he muttered, as he softly lowered his burden down upon the sawdust-covered floor, the brothers side by side, save that the younger was lower—nearer to his mother earth.

Then, in a quick, business-like way, North stepped to the door, passed through, and locked it, and then served the iron gate in the railings the same.

"I must fetch my instruments away some day," he muttered—"if I stay. No one will seek him there. He will be supposed to have fled from me. But Moredock?

"Moredock can be trusted; I can silence him," he said grimly. "He knew who was there."

North stood thinking for a few minutes in the churchyard, half startled, but feeling a certain relief as well as pleasure in the fact that his rival was removed from his path.

Then that word "rival" seemed to strike him a mental blow, for it brought up to his confused intellect why it was that he and Tom Candlish had been rivals; and at this thought he once again saw Leo, the woman he had loved, gazing wildly in his face; and, with a low moan, he staggered, more than walked, from the churchyard, making instinctively for home; but as he reached the

sexton's cottage, the faint light therein attracted him, and, feeling dizzy, he put his hand to his head, to find that it was bleeding freely.

As he hesitated whether to go in or hurry on, the door, which had been ajar, opened more widely, and a great, claw-like hand was thrust out, and he was guided to the big Windsor chair.

"Hurt, doctor? All over blood? Don't say you didn't dress him down."

North made no answer, for the low-ceiled room seemed sailing round as he turned his ghastly face and gazed in the speaker's eyes.

CHAPTER XV.

A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT.

"My turn now," said Moredock, with a low chuckle. "Times as he's given me doses. He, he, he! I can give him one now."

The old sexton took a key from his vest, and opened a curious old oaken corner cupboard, upon whose shelves were ranged a variety of objects which gleamed out from their prison, and seemed to suggest that they had not been honestly come by. The most prominent object, however, was a square, black schnapps bottle, with a footless glass turned upside down beside it.

"There, doctor," chuckled the old man, as he made the cork squeak and the liquid gurgle when he poured some out; "that arn't

the same physic as you give me, but it's real fine, and was sent down to me by a London gent as I've dealt with many a time."

North did not hesitate, but drank the dram of strong brandy at a gulp.

"That puts life into you, don't it, doctor, eh? Better now?"

"Hah!" sighed North, returning the glass, and leaning back in the chair. "No, no; that will do."

The stimulus did more than carry off the sensation of fainting, it gave back the power to think consistently; and North sat up as if considering what he should do next.

"He's knocked you about a bit, doctor," said Moredock, breaking in upon his musings.

"Eh? Yes; we had a sharp struggle," said North, starting.

"Sent him home like a cur with his tail between his legs, haven't you, doctor?"

North shuddered and caught Moredock's arm.

"How did you know that—that he was there?"

"Oh, I foun' it out!" said the old man

evasively. "I've seen ends of cigars there and ashes on the floor; and I thought at first that parson smoked, and told him of it."

"And—and what did he say?"

"Looked guilty," chuckled the old man.

North was silent for a few moments, sitting with one hand across his eyes, trying to think out what he should do.

"Moredock," he said, sharply turning on the old man; "why did you show me that to-night?"

The sexton gazed at him fixedly.

"Tell me—the truth."

"Well, doctor, it didn't do for young Squire Tom to be dessicating my church."

"You had some other reason."

"Well, it warn't safe for us. He might ha' foun' us out."

"Yes, exactly; but you would have warned me instead of taking me there. Why did you do that?"

"Well, doctor, of course I warn't blind."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you see," said the old man, with a

grin, "the saxun's pay arn't much; and a man looks out for what's coming to help him on."

"I don't understand you, man."

"Well, berrin's and christenin's and marriagein's as all bring in a bit more. I've sin it for long enough."

"Seen what?"

"That you was doin' a bit o' courting up at the Rect'ry; and it didn't seem nice for your young lady to be going out o' nights to meet Squire Tom, and in my church."

North groaned.

"Never you mind, doctor; I like you," said Moredock soothingly.

"Was this—was this known about the village?"

"'Bout you, or 'bout young miss?"

"Both, man, both!"

"Nay, not it. I see a deal, because I'm a man as thinks, doctor. No; I don't s'pose any one knows on it. But never you mind, doctor; gels always will be gels and listen to chaps like Squire Tom. But I say," whispered the old man, with a chuckle,

after crossing to the window and seeing that the print curtain was well drawn over the broken patch through which the leaden tobacco jar had been hurled, "did you give it him well?"

North groaned.

"Why, doctor! Took more bad?"

The old man glanced at the hand he had laid upon the doctor's shoulder, and wiped it, for it was wet with blood; and the sight of the hideous smear seemed to raise a terrible thought in his brain.

"Why, doctor," he said, in a low whisper; "you haven't — you haven't hurt him much?"

North seized the old man's arm, and sat gazing wildly at him for a few moments without speaking. He was battling with the mental confusion that troubled him and kept him in a state of hesitancy, in which his mind drifted like a derelict at sea.

He mastered it at last, and began to see clearly that, from what the old sexton knew, he must continue to make him his confidant. There could be no half measures. For his

own safety he must tell him all; though even now there was Leo, who knew of the encounter.

No; she dare not speak, suspect what she might. For her reputation's sake, she must hold her tongue.

Meanwhile, the old man glanced at his hand again, and, with a look of disgust, went through the action of wiping it.

"Why, doctor—doctor!" he whispered; "don't say you've——!"

"I couldn't help it, Moredock," said North excitedly. "It was in the struggle: it was a fight for life. We were both mad with rage, and I—I struck him."

"Ay, ay, doctor; but you needn't ha' hit him so hard. Look at the blood! Deary, deary; and all this trouble about a gel."

"I don't know how it happened," panted North, clinging tightly to the old man's arm. "I must have given him a terrible blow."

"But it's a hanging matter, doctor—a hanging matter!" whispered the sexton.

"Don't hold me, man; I didn't do it! I won't be dragged into it! I didn't know you'd go and do that!"

"I didn't mean to, Moredock. It was in my rage."

"But it's murder, doctor; it's murder, and they'll try you for your life!"

"It must not be known. We must——"

"Nay, nay: it isn't we," protested the old man. "It was you did it. I was skeered about you both getting wild, and I thought I'd be out of it, and came home."

"But you must help me, Moredock! You shall help me, man!"

"I can't help you, doctor: it's murder!" protested the sexton, trying to escape from the fierce grasp which held him.

"It was not murder! It was fair fight!" cried North fiercely. "And, look here, man, you cannot help yourself. You must help me to hide this terrible night's work."

The old man ceased struggling; for the doctor's words impressed him, and he felt how thoroughly they two were linked together.

"But it's like cutting short a man's days," he half whimpered.

"Silence! Do what I say, and no one need know what has occurred."

"But——"

"Silence, I say!" cried North, firmly now. "Get your hat; we must go to the church at once."

Moredock stood half bent, and with his head turned to his companion.

"Where—where is he, doctor?"

"In the Candlish vault. I carried him there!"

"Hah!"

The sexton drew a long breath.

"You must come on and remove all traces of the struggle in the vestry, and then——"

"In the morslem, eh, doctor?" said the old man thoughtfully, and growing resigned to the difficulties of his position. "Well, we can put him where no one's likely to find him there. Hey, doctor, but it's been a bad thing for me to ha' met you!"

"Your lanthorn and matches — quick!" said North. "There is no time to lose!"

"But if—if—doctor?"

"If what?"

"If it is found out, you'll say a word for me. You've made me do all this. I do want to live my fifteen or twenty years more in peace."

"Trust me as you've trusted me before," said North, who was now speaking calmly enough, and had grasped the situation. "I tell you it was an accident—a horrible accident. It was in fair fight; and I have come off none too well."

"I'll stand by you, doctor," said the old man; "and we'll hide it safe. But there's Dally," he muttered to himself—"Dally. She'll know there's something wrong, for she won't believe. Not that he has gone away out o' fear o' doctor? Ay, she'll have to think that. My poor little lass—my poor little lass!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DOCTOR IS RELIEVED.

The old clock wheezed, and rattled, and spun round, and its weights ran down as the doctor and old Moredock entered the belfry door. Then, as the portal was closed, the dark place seemed to be filled with sound as the chimes rang out the four quarters, and then the deep-toned strokes of hammer upon bell proclaimed that it was nearing day.

"Only three o'clock," thought North, "and it seems as many days as hours."

They passed into the church as soon as the old man had lit his lanthorn and covered it with the skirt of his coat, which he held so that the light fell only upon the matting,

and here and there upon a brass or some half-worn letters cut in the stones.

The chancel door stuck and refused to open till the old man had held down his lanthorn to see what held it.

"What's here?" he whispered, as something glittered. "Young miss's bracelet," he added, as he dragged out the shining gewgaw, which Leo had dropped in her flight, and which had fallen close to the bottom of the door, and acted as a wedge. "Take hold, doctor."

"Pah!" ejaculated North, drawing back. "Throw it away."

"Ay, I'll throw it away," muttered the old man, stuffing the heavy gold circle into his pocket: "I'll throw it away. Hey, but lookye here."

He held up the lanthorn, and revealed the state of the vestry—the chair overturned, the table driven into a corner, and the gown and surplice torn from the pegs on which they had hung, trampled and twisted, while in one place the tiles close to the wainscot

were stained with blood, a few drops of which had splashed the panelled oak.

"Shut that window, man—quick! Hide your light."

Moredock obeyed, screening his lanthorn, and then climbing on to the oak chest and drawing in and fastening the hasp.

"Shall I——" he began, as he got down.

"Hang it, man, no!"

"Hist! Don't say that there word," whispered Moredock excitedly.

"You can come up here to-morrow, and clean up, and arrange the place. Let's get to the vault at once."

The old sexton's hands trembled as he opened the vestry door, but as he felt how calm and decisive his companion seemed to be, he took courage and followed North through the iron gate and down the steps to the mausoleum door.

"Keep that lanthorn well covered," whispered North, as he unlocked the door; "and you have not locked the gates."

The old man stepped back, feeling the

wisdom of his companion's proceedings as far as caution was concerned; and by the time he had stepped back, North was inside the great vault, holding the door for him to enter.

"There, let's have the light now," said the doctor bitterly. "Be firm. You are not afraid to face a dead man?"

"Nay, I'm not skeered now, doctor," whispered Moredock; "but you'll—you'll—you'll——"

"Pay you?"

"Ay, doctor. You see, it's—it's——"

"Don't halt and stammer, man," said the doctor sternly. "This is a terrible business, but I can trust you, and you can trust me. Stand by me firmly over this, and I will give you enough every year to make you comfortable to the end of your days."

"Hi, doctor, that's speaking out like a man," said Moredock, smiling hideously as he opened the horn lanthorn to snuff the candle with his fingers, when the light shone full in his face. "And he warn't no good, were he?"

"I dare say he valued his life as highly as I valued mine — yesterday," added the doctor softly.

"And he tried to kill you, didn't he?" whispered Moredock, closing the lanthorn again.

"As much as I tried to kill him, I suppose," said North. "We were fighting like two brute beasts."

"Ay, and it was for life, like," said Moredock, in a satisfied tone. "It warn't murder, doctor, were it?"

"By law, I suppose not," said North quietly, as he stood in his former attitude with his hand over his eyes. "There, we must not waste time. My experiment is over now, and we must restore this place to its old state."

"Not murder," said Moredock, with a chuckle; "of course not. I feel easy now."

He held the lanthorn over the extended form of Tom Candlish, which looked strangely ghastly by the feeble yellow light; and as he bent down, he could see that the

young squire had received two terrible blows—one on his forehead, and the other on the right temple — both of which had bled and left a hideous stain upon the sawdust.

"Dally 'll have to try again," said the old man to himself. "Enough a year to make me comf'table, and the doctor to keep me alive. You wouldn't ha' done that, Tom Candlish, over the money; and you couldn't ha' kept me alive when I was badly. You'd ha' been a brute to the gel too 'fore you'd had her long. There, it's all a blessing in disguise, as Parson Salis says."

He grinned in his ghoul-like way, and turned to touch North on the elbow.

"Doctor!" he whispered.

North's hands fell from before his eyes, and he turned to gaze wildly at the old man, as one gazes when suddenly awakened from a too heavy sleep.

"Yes! What is it? I'd forgotten. My head, man."

"Look here," whispered the old sexton, leading him to the far right-hand corner of

the vault, where a particularly florid old tarnished coffin handle dimly reflected the light in its ancient niche.

The old man gave the end of the coffin a rap with his knuckles.

"Empty," he whispered, grinning; and he tapped it again, so that it emitted a hollow sound.

"Empty?"

"Ay; empty now, doctor. An old Squire Candlish lay in there two hundred years ago a'most; now a new Squire Candlish can lie in it, eh?"

"Conceal the body there?" said North, who looked dazed.

"Tchah! Only put him in there to sleep: that's all, doctor; and nobody but us'll know."

"Quick, then," said North; "I'm a good deal hurt, man, and my head feels confused."

"Ay, to be sure, doctor, I'll be quick, and then you can go home and put yourself to rights, and go on again here just as before. Take hold."

North obeyed in a dreamy way, apparently

not knowing what he did; and as Moredock dragged out the old coffin, with its tattered velvet and tarnished ornamentations, he took the handle at the far end, and it was lifted down into the sawdust.

The old man took the screw-driver from where it lay on the new coffin, where Sir Luke should have reposed, and rapidly turned the screws, leaving each standing up in its hole, and then lifted off the lid, to disclose some yellow lining and faded flowers, turning rapidly to so much dust—nothing more.

"It'll fit him," whispered Moredock. "All the men Candlishes are 'bout the same size. "There, doctor," he continued, as he set the lid down. "Now, then, to make all safe."

The old man's words seemed to rouse North from his dreamy state, and with a start he looked at the old wretch before him, then at the empty coffin, and his quick medical appreciation of the situation seemed for the first time to have fully returned.

"Here; hold the light," he said.

"Better set it down there," whispered Moredock. "We can see better, then."

"Hold the light, I say," cried the doctor sternly; and he went down on one knee by the young squire's side.

Moredock looked on wonderingly, for it had not occurred to him to make any inquiry into the young man's state. North had as good as told him that he was slain, and to have questioned the doctor's verdict would have been unnatural. He stood there then in a bent position, holding the lanthorn, as North made a rapid examination of the young baronet, and then rose to his feet in a calm, practical manner, uttering a sigh of relief.

"Ready, doctor?" whispered Moredock, to whom all this seemed in the highest degree unnecessary.

"Ready, man? No. Put that ghastly thing away. Tom Candlish will go on working wickedness for years after you've been under ground."

Moredock straightened himself up, and held the lanthorn above his head, so that its light could fall upon the doctor's face. Then, apparently not satisfied, he lowered it, moved

the wire slide, and opened the little door, before turning the light on the doctor's face again.

"Well?" said North.

"What yer talking about, doctor? You don't mean—mean as—as——"

"I mean that the man is only stunned," said North, frowning, as he stood gazing down at his rival; "and we must alter all our plans, Moredock. Neither you nor I will be hung for murdering Tom Candlish," he added, with a half-savage laugh, as resentment against the man began to take the place of the horror which had pervaded his soul.

"Why, doctor," whispered Moredock, "you're a bit off your head. Come, man, quick; and let's get it done. No one will know."

"Pshaw! I'm as sane as you are when this confused feeling is not here."

"But Tom Candlish—the squire?"

"I tell you he's alive, man! Do you not understand?"

And the party in question endorsed his rival's statement by uttering a low moan.

At that moment, by natural magnetism, or influence, or occult action of mind upon mind, or whatever it may have been, two people who had lain wakeful and excited in their separate beds, now feverish, now perspiring profusely from horror and abject fear, turned their weary heads upon their pillows, and dropped off fast asleep.

The name of one of the sleepers was Leo Salis, and of the other Joe Chegg.

"But he's nearly dead, doctor," whispered Moredock, and he glanced round at the coffin. "Don't you think that——"

He made a significant sign towards the coffin, and there was a strange leer upon his ghoulish face.

Dr. North turned swiftly round, and caught his tempter by the throat!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SEXTON'S NEWS.

"You ring, sir?"

"Yes, Dally; go up to Miss Leo's room, and say we are waiting breakfast."

"Yes, sir," said Dally, and her black-currant eyes gave a malicious twinkle.

"Oh, how I should like to know," she muttered to herself, as she left the room.

"It's so tiresome," exclaimed Salis testily; "busy as I am this morning—letters to write. I must answer this last letter of May's. More complaints — more complaints! Oh, what a wretched curate he has got!"

Mary looked up from her seat, with her gentle smile, for she knew how the harsh crystals of annoyance would melt away with

the first cup of tea, and her brother be all smiles again.

"Wouldn't you like to begin, dear?"

"Begin? Without Leo! You know, Mary, how particular she is, and how she would feel it as a slight. Tut—tut—tut! How late she is! Mrs. Berens, too, been writing. Do you know, Mary, I wish that woman would leave the place!"

"She is not likely to, Hartley," said Mary, who was propped up with cushions at the head of the table, having lately taken her old place once more; "and she is very kind and good."

"Yes, that's the worst of it," said Salis grimly. "If she were a disagreeable old harridan, it would not matter so much. Oh! here she comes."

Leo came quickly into the breakfast-room, looking strained about the eyes, to cross to Mary, put down her right cheek to be kissed, and then to go to her brother, extend him her hand, and lower her left cheek for a second salute.

"That's right, dear," said Salis cheerily;

"but you are terribly late. I'm so busy this morning."

"Why did you not begin?" said Leo, as she languidly took her place.

"Without you? Not likely. Pour out, Mary, dear. Why, Leo—not well?"

"Not well?" she said, repeating his words calmly enough. "I am quite well, dear."

"But you look——"

"As if I had overslept myself," said Leo quietly. "Any letters?"

"Yes. One sent on by Mrs. Berens about the parish poor. Must bring that up this morning. One from May. That wicked old man! I know he keeps on with this persecution—there, I can call it nothing else —on purpose to get me to resign."

"And you will not resign, Hartley," said Leo; "you will set him at defiance."

"I don't know. I do love a quiet life, and I cannot get it. Now, here's this morning. Letters to write—more tea, Mary. Ten-o'clock meeting in the vestry."

"Ah!"

"Why, Leo, dear!" cried the curate, half starting from his chair, while Mary gazed wonderingly at her sister.

"There's nothing the matter, good people," said Leo contemptuously. "A touch of toothache! The weather, I suppose."

"You quite startled me," said Salis cheerily. "Visit to the dentist imminent, my dear. Let's see, where was I? Oh, yes! Vestry meeting at ten," he continued, turning to a memorandum-book; "Sir Thomas Candlish to preside, by special request."

Leo's face was ghastly, but she mastered her emotions by a tremendous effort of will; and, rising from her seat, she fetched a book from the sideboard, opened it as she returned to her place, and went on reading with her breakfast.

"Ah! you'll be glad to hear this, Mary," said Salis. "North is going to bring up the question of those four dilapidated cottages. He says they are regular fever generators, and that Sir Thomas shall have them pulled down, for they are a disgrace to the place."

"They certainly are not fit for human

habitation, Hartley," said Mary, who could not keep her wondering eyes off her sister, making a pretence of eating and reading, but doing neither. She could do nothing but listen to the recital of peril after peril accumulating round her, and all following upon a pert, insolent reply given her by Dally Watlock as she was coming down.

"I expect we shall have a storm," continued Salis, as if to himself. "It's like asking the arbitrary landlord to have a tooth out, to pull down a labourer's cottage."

Leo Salis had the spirit and cruelty of heart of an old Roman woman. She could have viewed with a feeling of intense delight a gladiatorial exhibition, and turned down her thumb with the worst of them for the death-warrant of any poor wretch who had not displayed a sufficiency of courage. To her the new-born passion of Horace North had been a matter of intense satisfaction, and she had revelled with a malicious joy in the feeling that she had made him her slave —one who would never meet with the slightest

reward. But while she was careless of the pain she inflicted upon others, she could suffer keenly at times, and this was one of these occasions. She loved as a tigress might love, and her affection had become centred upon the brutal, coarse-minded, athletic scoundrel, who ranked as a gentleman, but whose tastes and ways were those of a low-class stable helper; and now, after a night of miserable anxiety lest her lover should have been injured by North, while she dare make no inquiry as to what had occurred—she found herself obliged to sit there chained as much by inclination as by necessity to hear that Tom Candlish and the doctor were to be brought face to face before her brother in the scene of the previous night's encounter.

After a short sleep, she had awoke at dawn to ask herself what she should do—whether she should fly from the Rectory, and bid Tom Candlish take her away, so that she should not be called upon to face the scornful looks and contempt of North.

But after a time her stubborn and determined nature had taught her that she would

be at a great disadvantage with Tom Candlish if she went to him. He would be no longer the suer but the sued, and she was determined that he should make her his wife.

"North dare not speak to me; and if he did, what then? He is my slave, and I will meet him. Let him come, and say what he likes. I am no sickly, sentimental girl who feels bound to obey every one in turn. I will not go. I'll face it all."

She could not conceal her aspect, but her heart was strong when she came down that morning till the troubles seemed to accumulate, and a black cloud of care, which she could not penetrate, appeared to be rising.

Salis went on hurriedly with his breakfast, talking of the business in the vestry; and all the time Leo was wondering how it was that North could have known of their meetings — how the vestry looked that morning — what the old sexton would say, and how this trouble would settle down.

She glanced furtively aside, and saw that Mary was watching her.

This set her wondering whether her sister knew anything, and of whether her nocturnal escapades would reach her brother's ears.

It was not likely, she told herself; and she was gradually growing more composed, when Dally presented herself briskly at the door, her eyes twinkling, and a quiet, satisfied look about her which seemed to show that she was pleased with the task she had in hand.

"Note from Dr. North, sir! No answer."

"Hah! about the cottages," said Salis, smiling as he opened the note, Dally closing the door after darting a triumphant glance at Leo, which was not seen. "Ammunition to use against the enemy. How provoking!"

"Is anything wrong, Hartley?" said Mary, while Leo bent lower over her book.

"Wrong? Yes! There always is something wrong. Poor Horace is unwell this morning, and cannot attend the vestry."

Leo's heart gave a bound. Her brave, strong lover had beaten the wretched intruder, and he had curled up in his hole, afraid to come out. There was nothing to

fear from Horace North but his contempt, and she could meet that with her scorn.

"My poor people's cottages!" sighed Salis. "They'll have to wait. Well, I'm not malignant, but if a fever is generated there, I hope the landlord will be the first to catch it."

"Hartley!" cried Mary, in remonstrant tones.

"I didn't say and be cut off," cried Salis, laughing, glancing at the window. "I meant to read him a severe lesson. Hallo! Job redivivus! I'm Job. Here comes another messenger. Why, what does old Moredock want?"

Leo's heart sank. She felt that she knew, and shrank from the ordeal, as Dally meekly opened the breakfast-room door.

"Please, sir, gran'fa says can he speak to you a minute?"

"Certainly, Dally; bring him in. Port wine, Mary!" he added, as soon as the maid had left the room; and he recalled certain words he had let fall about the missing

bottles of tent, and his promise to give the old fellow wine if he were unwell.

"Surely, Hartley, you are not going to have that dreadful old man in here!" panted Leo, who felt half suffocated by her emotion, as she recalled the last night's scene in the vestry.

"Why not, dear?"

"It is too horrible—the sexton!"

"Nonsense, child! Poor old fellow! His stay on earth cannot be for long; let's make it as free from social thorns as we can. Morning, Moredock!" he cried, as Dally ushered the old man in, to stand bowing to Mary and her sister before making a scrape or two before the curate.

"Mornin', young ladies! Mornin', sir! Smart mornin', sir! Sorry to trouble you at braxfus, but I was obliged to come."

Leo acknowledged the bow without rising, bent lower over her book, and, with teeth set hard, stole one hand under the cloth to grasp the edge of the table and grip it with all her might.

"What, about the vestry meeting—to tell me Dr. North was ill?"

"Doctor ill! Is he though, sir?" croaked Moredock, as his red eyes wandered from face to face.

"Yes, he is unwell, Moredock, and cannot come."

"Bad job—bad job, sir! Doctors has no business to be ill. S'p'ose I was took bad, I shouldn't like to trust Dr. Benson. I never did have no faith in King's Hampton folk at all. But it warn't about that."

"What, then? Nothing serious, I hope?"

"Ay; but it be, sir," croaked the old man, staring for a moment at Mary, and then fixing his eyes upon Leo. "It is very ser'ous. Some un's been in the night and made a burgly in the chutch."

"What!" cried Salis, starting up. "Great heavens, Moredock! is this true?"

"Ay, it be true enough, parson."

"But they haven't taken the plate?"

"Nay, the plate be safe, though."

"The poor-boxes, then? Thank goodness,

Mary, I emptied them the day before yesterday. How providential!"

"They never touched poor-boxes," croaked Moredock; "and if I might make so bold, parson, I'm a bit weak i' th' legs yet, and I'd like to sit down."

"Yes, yes, sit down, Moredock; but pray speak out."

"Well, you see, sir, they didn't get into my chutch: only into vestry."

Leo felt that she must get up and leave the room, but she lacked the power.

"The vestry!" cried Salis. "What have they taken?"

"Well, as far as I can make out, sir, they broke in at window, and then they must ha' been skeered, for they only thev one thing."

"What!—the wine?"

"Nay, nay, nay. Wine's all right—locked up in the cupboard," croaked Moredock. "They've stole your surplus, sir."

"Impossible!" cried Salis, giving the table a sounding thump with his closed fist,

and bursting into a roar of laughter. "Impossible, Mary. I haven't any surplus for them to steal."

"Ay, well," grumbled the old sexton, looking wonderingly at the curate and then at Leo and Mary in turn; "you may say so, parson, but I know. It were a hanging up on peg alongside o' the gownd, and they'd pulled 'em both down to take away, when they must have been skeered, and they chowked the gownd down in the corner by the oak chesty, and the surplus is gone."

"Ah, well, it might have been worse," said Salis, with a sigh. "It was my new one, though, and the old one is terribly darned. Leo, dear, you will have to get out the old one again. Mary has the keys."

"It be a bad job, parson."

"It is, Moredock, a very bad job; but I'm glad the wretches were scared. I won't believe it was any one from Duke's Hampton."

"Nay, it were some of the King's Hampton lot, safe, parson. Ugh! they're a bad set out yunder. I thought it my dooty to

come on and tell you, sir, and now I'm going away back."

"Let me give you a cup of tea, Moredock," said Mary; "you look tired."

"Bless your sweet eyes and heart, miss, and thankye kindly," said Moredock. "Cup o' tea's a great comfort to a lone old man. And thankye kindly for undertaking to take care o' my Dally, as wants it, like most young gels. Why, Miss Mary, I've know'd you since you was quite a little thin slip."

"You have, Moredock," said Mary, smiling, as she handed the tea to her brother for the old man, who paid no farther heed to Leo. "I was only fifteen when I first saw you."

"Ay, and you was as bright and quick as now you're—— Well, never mind that, my dear. Better be an angel as can't walk about than some beautiful gels as can."

"Why, Moredock," said Salis, laughing, "was that meant for a compliment?"

"I dunno, parson," said the old man, staring hard at Mary; "'tis only what I

felt. Heaven bless her! I never see her face wi'out thinking o' stained glass windows, wi' wire outside to keep away the stones; and I says, may no stones never be throwed at her."

The old man gulped down his tea, and rose to go.

"You'll be on at vestry room, sir?"

"Yes, Moredock; and once more I'm glad it's no worse."

"Like me to go over in Badley's donkey-cart, sir, to tell the police?"

"Well, yes, Moredock. We must give notice about the scoundrels, I suppose, or they may come again."

"Mornin', then, sir, and my service to you, Miss Mary, and thankye kindly, my dear," said the old man, hobbling off without a word or look at Leo; and, oddly enough, as he reached the road he wiped a tear from each of his watery eyes.

"And so she is," he muttered, "a real angel. My Dally never said, 'Have a cup o' tea, gran'fa; you're hot and tired.' Ah! gels is made different, but my Dally's worth two o' that tother one."

"Police, eh?" he muttered, as he went on. "I was 'bliged to take it away twissened up into a rag, and if it had been washed somebody would have known. Ah, well, I know what to do wi' that."

So the old man went straight home, and fastened the door, before taking the soiled and crumpled surplice from his oak chest; and then carefully picking it to pieces and rolling it up.

"My Dally shall wash that, first time she comes, and nobody'll know it's a surplus now. She might ha' asked her old gran'fa to have a cup o' tea."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT CANDLISH HALL.

"My Dally" had been otherwise employed, for a messenger had come over from the Hall to see the curate; and at the time her grandfather was departing, Dally was cross-examining the good-tempered, loutish youth respecting his master, and getting out of him all she could glean.

"Job is having it this morning," said Salis, for he heard a familiar step in the passage, as soon as the sexton had gone. "What now, Dally? No more bad news?"

"Bad news, sir?" said the girl, speaking to her master, and gazing at Leo, who did not look up. "I don't think so, sir. It's the young man from Candlish Hall, sir, to see you partikler."

"I knew it," cried Salis to Mary, as Leo bent lower. "Candlish has sent word that he cannot come. Now, how the de——"

"Hartley!"

"Well, it's enough to make a saint swear. How can a man carry on his parish work like this? I wish to goodness May had it to do himself. Show him in, Dally."

The girl departed, and returned directly with the servant from the Hall, who looked stealthily at Salis, and then from Leo to Mary and back.

"Can I speak to you alone, sir?" he said.

"Yes, yes, my man, certainly. Is it anything serious?"

"Yes, sir—very, sir. I've come——"

"Here, this way, to my study, my man," said Salis, rising.

"Stop!"

Salis had reached the door—his hand was on the knob, and he was about to turn it; but the sharp, commanding voice made him turn in astonishment, to see Leo standing erect, with her head thrown back, her eyes

flashing, and her hand resting upon the book —closed now—and one finger shut in to mark the place.

"Leo!"

"Yes; I said 'stop.' We are not children," she cried, in an imperative voice. "Let the man speak here."

"It was about Sir Thomas, ma'am—my master," faltered the man, before Salis had recovered from his astonishment. "An accident."

"An accident?" cried Leo, as Salis stepped to her side, and laid his hand upon her arm; but she shrank away. "Well, sir, why do you not speak?"

"Am I to speak, sir?" faltered the man.

"Yes; speak out," said Salis quietly.

"My master did not come home last night, sir—I mean this morning. He often goes out of a night, sir, very late; but he always comes in at daybreak. I've seen him dozens of times."

"Yes; go on," said Leo harshly.

"He didn't come back, miss—ma'am; and I was thinking about it when I went to the

stables and took his mare and the pad-horse out for exercise."

"Speak more quickly, man," said Leo imperiously.

"Yes, ma'am. We'd got down nearly to the ford, when the mare — master's mare, ma'am—shied at something, and nearly threw me."

"The mare shied?" said Leo, with her eyes dilating.

"Yes, ma'am; and I saw it was at master lying there by the side of the road."

"Dead?"

"No, ma'am, but very bad. His head was——"

"Hush!" said Salis, interrupting sternly. "No particulars, my man; only answer me this—was it a fall?"

"Oh, no, sir! some one had been beating him about the head with a stick, I should say."

"Had he been robbed?"

"Oh, no, sir! His watch and chain and pin were all right."

"Was he insensible?" continued Salis.

"Yes, sir; quite, sir; and seemed to have been staggering about the road, trying to get home, for there was bl——"

"Hush, man! Only answer my questions," cried Salis hastily. "You got him home?"

"Yes, sir," said the man, who could not keep his eyes off Leo, who was gazing at him wildly—in a way which taught her brother that the old love for Tom Candlish was far from dead.

"And then——"

"And then, sir, as soon as we'd got him on his bed, I galloped off for Dr. North, sir."

"Yes."

"But he's ill, sir, and the housekeeper said he couldn't come to the Hall."

"Well?"

"I hardly knew what to do, then, sir; but as I was wondering what was best, Joe Chegg come up, sir—he used to be a groom, you know—and I jumped off the mare, and made him get up and go off to King's Hampton to fetch Dr. Benson, while I came on to you."

"Quite right," said Salis. "I'll come on with you directly. Mary, my dear, send a line to Moredock to say that there will be no vestry meeting. Yes? You were going to speak, Leo."

She shook her head, and half closed her eyes, as she turned away, shivering at the feeling of vindictive rage which ran through her, as in imagination she seemed to see the result of the encounter which had taken place, and that it was Tom Candlish who had fared by far the worse.

Salis's countenance grew more stern, as he leaned over to Mary, and stooped over to say a few words in her ear.

"Try and keep her by your side. We must have no foolish excitement now."

"I will try," said Mary gently; and she looked up to see that Leo was watching them both inquiringly, her face contracted, and a singular look in her eyes.

For she was wondering what would be the result of her brother's meeting with the young squire; and then as she drew her breath painfully, the thoughts of self and

the dread of detection gave place to feelings of horror respecting the man she loved, and of hate, the most bitter and intense, against North, whom she now longed to meet that she might revile him—heap upon his head her bitterness and contempt.

"It's scared us, sir, horrible," said the man as he walked back with Salis.

"Have you any idea who attacked your master?" said Salis.

"Not a bit, sir. That's the puzzle of it. If it had been for his money, they'd have taken it all, and his watch. We can't understand it a bit."

"I can," said Salis to himself. "The scoundrel has been insulting some one's child, or sweetheart, or wife, and been half killed for his pains. I wonder who was the guilty party? Well I know that," he muttered with a half laugh—"Tom Candlish."

"Yes, sir; beg pardon, sir."

"What for, my man?" said Salis, feeling a little disconcerted.

"I thought you laughed, sir, and said something."

"No, no, my man; only a way of mine."

They walked on in silence after this, Salis feeling very sore at heart as he thought of his sister, and how painful it was that she should still care, as she evidently did, for such a worthless scoundrel.

"Even the knowledge of this new escapade would not move her, I'm afraid," he muttered. "Well, matters like this must settle themselves."

They now reached the Hall, to find the servants assembled, and in a state of the most intense excitement.

"Master was no worse," the old butler said. "He had been asking for brandy."

"What? You did not give it to him?" cried Salis excitedly.

"I was obliged to, sir. You can't know Sir Thomas, or you wouldn't talk like that. But I'm very glad you've come, sir. It's such a responsibility, having him so bad. He's terribly cut about, sir. Please come in and see if you can do anything more than I have till the doctor comes."

Salis followed the old butler up to the

bedroom, where Tom Candlish lay upon the bed, and, as the butler said, terribly cut about the head; for, in addition to the bruises upon his head and temple, he had a cut lip, and the very perfection of two black eyes.

"I don't think you need be alarmed," whispered Salis to the old man, as the door was opened, and the young squire saluted the butler with a volley of good stable oaths.

What the something unmentionable did he mean by bringing the parson? he raved.

"Do you think I'm going to die, and want to be prayed for? Send for a doctor."

"I did, Sir Thomas," said the butler deprecatingly; "but Dr. North——"

"Curse Dr. North!" roared the young man. "Send for Dr. Benson."

"I have, Sir Thomas, and——"

"Be off, you old idiot! And you, Salis, you'd better go too, or I may say something to you that you will not like."

"You can say what you please, my good fellow," said Salis, coolly taking off his coat

for the second time in the young man's presence.

"You coward," groaned the injured man; "and when I'm like that. Your cursed sister——"

"Silence, you scoundrel!" roared Salis. "Here, fetch water in a basin, sponges, towels, and linen that I can cut up," he continued to the butler, who gladly hurried out of the room. "And you, Candlish, unless you wish to rage yourself into a fever, be quiet; but I warn you that if you mention my sister again, sick or well, I will not be answerable for the consequences."

"What are you going to do?" growled the young man suspiciously.

"Do, sir? What I would do for any other dog that I saw lying wounded in the road. I'm going to doctor you till proper qualified assistance comes."

"He doesn't know," thought Tom Candlish. Then aloud: "I thought you were going to take a mean advantage of me now I was down."

"You thought I was just such a cowardly,

mean-spirited brute as you are, and as treacherous, eh?" said Salis bitterly, as he rapidly removed the clumsy bandage about the young man's head. "Why, hallo! what does this mean?"

"What does what mean?"

"Your head. It has been bandaged."

"Yes; that old idiot of a butler did it."

"No; I mean this other. It has been properly strapped up."

"Has it?"

"Yes," said Salis. "The old man knows more about it than you think for. There, lie still."

"Who's to lie still with his head on fire?" growled the injured man. "Here, ring for some brandy."

"You mean for the undertaker," said Salis coolly.

"No; the brandy," snarled Tom Candlish. "I'm sick and faint."

"And you'll be more sick and more faint if you take spirits now. There, lie still, and I'll try and cool your head with this sponge and water."

For the butler had re-entered, and for the next half hour the curious spectacle was visible of Hartley Salis playing the good Samaritan, with all the knowledge of experience, to the man who was doing his best to bring ruin and misery upon his peaceful home.

The delicate, almost feminine touch, soothed the pain Tom Candlish suffered; and he lay quietly upon the pillow, looking up at the curate, wondering whether he would do this if he knew all, and what he would say if he knew that he had deluded Leo into leaving her room night after night, to grant him meetings in the old vestry time after time, in spite of all that had been said.

The butler had gone, and Tom Candlish was lying with his eyes half closed, thinking about his last meeting with Leo, of the coming of the doctor, of their encounter, and of the way in which he had been struck down, when just after Salis had carefully laid a cool, moist towel upon his aching head, the door softly opened, and the baronet started up in bed

with his ghastly face distorted as he uttered quite a yell.

"Ah, Horace, old fellow!" cried the curate excitedly. "I have been reproaching myself for not coming down to you. Here is my excuse. I'm so glad you've come."

"Keep him off! Send him away!" yelled Tom Candlish, trying vainly to get to the other side of the bed, as North stood pale, choking, and suffering in the doorway.

"Don't take any notice," continued Salis; "a bit delirious, I'm afraid;" and then he gazed wonderingly at his friend as, with a fierce, implacable look, North strode up to the bed.

CHAPTER XIX.

DOCTOR AND PATIENT.

"KEEP him off! He wants to murder me!"

"My good fellow," said Salis sternly, "you are trying to murder yourself. Sit still, or I'll hold you down. If you don't know what's good for yourself, it's fit some one should."

"But I tell you——"

"And I tell you," cried Salis angrily, for Tom Candlish's fierce obstinacy was teaching him that the clerical garb and years of mental repression will not quite crush out the natural man.

"It's very good of you to come, North," he said, crossing to his friend. "Getting up out of a sick bed, too, for the cause of this brute.

I wish sometimes that education did not force us to be so extremely benevolent and philanthropic over *mauvais sujets;* but it does. Are you better?"

"Yes," said North hastily; and his face being free from marks, he was able to confront his friend boldly. "I knew there was no doctor within reach, and I was afraid the case might be turning serious. Let's see."

He walked up to the bed, with Tom Candlish quailing before him, and watching his eyes as some timid animal might when expecting capture or a blow.

"I protest—I——"

"Hold your tongue, sir," cried Salis sternly. "Dr. North is here for your good. Lie still."

"I don't know whether my way is right," he added to himself, "but firmness appears to be best with the brute."

North seemed to hesitate a few minutes—fighting between routine, the desire to do what was right by the man he believed he had nearly killed, and his intense dislike, even

hatred, of the scoundrel for whom he told himself he had been jilted by a wretched, shameless girl.

Salis looked on curiously.

"Effect of the power of the eye," he said to himself, as he saw North lay his hands upon the injured man's shoulders, and, bending down, gaze into his eyes for a few moments. "By George! Horace North is a big fellow in his profession, and I shall begin to believe in psychology, mesmerism, animal magnetism, and the rest of it, before I've done."

He leaned forward to gaze intently at what was going on.

"Quells him at once," he said to himself. "Humph! he needn't be quite so rough."

This was consequent upon a quick, brusque examination of the patient, which evidently gave Tom Candlish a great deal of pain.

"Here, parson!" he yelled; "this man's——"

He did not finish, for North's teeth grated together, and he tightened his grasp

so firmly that Tom Candlish's head sank back, his battered face elongated, and he lay perfectly still, feeling quite at the mercy of his enemy.

North ended his examination by literally thrusting Tom Candlish back upon his pillow in a way which made Salis stare.

"He will not hurt, save to do plenty more mischief, Salis. Look here; have you sent for Dr. Benson?"

"Yes, sir," said the butler wonderingly.

"Your master will be all right till he comes. Tell Dr. Benson that I only came in upon the emergency. I have nothing to do with the case."

"Certainly, sir."

"And," said North savagely, and evidently for Tom Candlish to hear, "if your master wishes to commit suicide, put that brandy decanter by his side. He smells of it now like poison. Come along, Salis."

"You think him fit to be left?"

"Fit to be left!" cried North, whose uneasy conscience was now at rest. "Here: come away."

"Why, Horace, old man, this is not like you," cried Salis, as they were going down to the lodge gate.

"Like me!" cried North, turning upon him with a searching look, and reading in his eyes his thorough ignorance of the state of affairs. "No, it is not, old boy. I'm ill. My head aches fit to split, and the sight of that man, now my nerves are on the rack, exasperates me."

"Well, never mind. It was very good of you to get up and come; but, all the same, I'm glad you did, for it has set my mind at rest as to danger. There's no danger—you are sure?"

"Sure? Yes. He has the physique of a bull. Curse him!"

"Ha—ha—ha—ha—ha!" roared Salis, laughing in the most undignified manner, and then raising his eyes to encounter the fierce gaze of his friend.

"What are you laughing at?" cried North angrily.

"At Tom Candlish—the noble Sir Thomas! It's comic, now that I know there is no

danger. Why, Horace, old fellow, don't you know how it happened?"

North paused as he stared wildly at Leo's brother.

"Don't I know how it happened?" he faltered.

"It's over some love affair, and the scoundrel has been caught."

"What?"

"Yes; that's it," cried Salis joyously. "I don't know for certain, and this is confoundedly unclerical, but it's glorious. The brute! Some father or brother or lover has caught him, and thrashed him within an inch of his life. My dear Horace, I don't know when I've felt so pleased."

The doctor's face was a study of perplexity in its most condensed form. The injury to his head had tended to confuse him, so that he could not think clearly according to his wont, and he felt a longing to explain everything to, and confide in, his old friend; but he could not speak, for how could he tell him that his sister had been so base? It must come from another, or

Salis must find it out for himself; he could not speak.

"I've talked to the fellow before," continued the curate. "I've preached to him; I've preached at him; and all the time I've felt like a bee upon the back of a rhinoceros, hard at work blunting my sting. Stick, sir, stick is the only remedy for an ill like that of Squire Tom, and, by George! Horace, he has had a tremendous dose."

"Yes," said North, whose conscience felt more at ease now that he had satisfied himself as to the young man's state.

"Did you see his eyes?" cried Salis, laughing again; "swollen up till they look like slits; and won't they be a glorious colour, too—eh, Horace, old fellow! There, don't bully me for saying it, but you know what used to trouble me. How I should like Leo to have her disenchantment completed. I should have liked her to see the miserable brute as he is—battered and flushed with brandy."

North started violently.

"There, there, I ought not to have said

it, but I'm speaking of my own sister, and of something of the past which you know all about. How can girls be such idiots?"

North did not speak, but walked swiftly on beside his friend, who, repenting of what he had said, and feeling that it had been in execrable taste, hastened to change the subject, so as to place the doctor at ease.

"Did you hear this morning's news?" he said.

"News?" said North, turning sharply.

"No; of course you could not, being ill in bed, where you'd better go again. Burglary, my boy. We're getting on."

"Burglary?"

"Yes; sacrilegious burglary, sir. One of those King's Hampton rascals—one of May's lambs—broke into the vestry last night."

It was on North's lips to say furiously, "There, speak out, man! If you know all about this, say so at once;" but the words seemed to halt there, and he only gazed wonderingly as Salis talked on in his easy, good-tempered way.

"Moredock came up to tell me this morning."

"Moredock?"

"Yes; we were to have had the vestry meeting, you know."

"Of course: I said I was too ill to come," said North hoarsely.

"So you are. Well, the old fellow went up to dust and put the place straight, and he found that some one had broken in by the window, and had evidently been interrupted, for my gown was torn down and thrown on the floor, and they had carried off my new surplice."

"Carried off your surplice!" stammered North.

"Yes," said the curate, looking at his friend wonderingly, and thinking how ill he seemed. "Nearly new surplice, sir; and I shall have to come round *in formâ pauperis* for subscriptions to get another. You will have to fund up among the rest, if you don't want to see your poor parson in rags, or sister Mary working her poor little fingers

to the bone to keep the old one darned. Ah! here we are."

The curate uttered a sigh of relief, for he had been chattering away with a purpose—to keep his friend's attention from his state, for, as he held his arm, he could feel him reel from time to time.

"Thank Heaven!" muttered North, as he staggered in at the gates of the Manor. "Good-bye, Salis, good-bye."

"Yes, I'll say good-bye presently, old chap. It's no use disguising the fact. You're ill, and ought not to have come out. I shall see you to bed, and you must tell me what to do."

"No, no; I can manage," protested North.

But Salis would not go.

"My dear boy, it's of no use. You know how obstinate I am. I should stop with you if it were small-pox, so just hold your tongue. Hah! Now Mrs. Milt, the doctor's got his turn after laughing at us poor mortals so long. Let's get him to bed, and you must help me to keep him there."

"I'm not a bit surprised," began Mrs.

Milt, in a vinegary, snappish way; and then the tears started to her eyes, and she caught North's hand in hers and kissed it. "Oh, my poor, dear master!" she sobbed.

It was all momentary. The spasm passed off, and in a busy, tender, matter-of-fact way, she helped the half-delirious man to bed, when, acting upon a hint or two he gave, the old housekeeper and Salis laid their heads together to prescribe.

CHAPTER XX.

A PARCEL BY CARRIER.

Dr. Benson drove over daily from King's Hampton to attend Sir Thomas Candlish, and, to do Dr. Benson justice, he made a very good professional job of the injury to the young baronet, both from his own and the ordinary point of view.

Tom Candlish protested, but the doctor was inexorable.

"No, sir," he said, "injuries like yours require time. Nature must be able to thoroughly mend the damage done. I could have helped her to patch you up—to cobble you, so to speak; but the tender spot would break out again. I must do my work thoroughly."

"But your drives over here—your bill will be monstrous."

"Large, but not monstrous, my dear sir," said Dr. Benson, smiling; "and what are a few pounds compared to your valuable life?"

Tom Candlish lay thinking that there was something in this, and that it was far better to pay even a hundred pounds than to have been carried to the Candlish mausoleum, and without paying out North for the injuries he had received.

"How's North?" he said.

"Oh, very well, I believe. Dr. North and I do not meet very often. A clever young man, though—a very clever young man."

"Humph! Don't believe in him," said Tom Candlish. "But he has been very ill."

"Little touch of sunstroke, or something of that kind, sir. I saw his patients for two days only; then he was about again."

"Humph!" ejaculated Tom Candlish. "Doctor, I'm low to-day; I must have some champagne."

"My dear sir! out of the question."

"Brandy, then!"

"Worse and worse."

"But I'm sinking. This cursed low feeling is horrible."

"Well, well!" said the doctor smoothly, as, after a moment's consideration, he felt that the wine would only throw his patient back for a few days, and give him a longer period for attendance; "perhaps a drop—say, half a glass—would not hurt you, but I would not exceed half a glass; champagne glass, mind. Good morning."

Dr. Benson took his departure, perfectly aware that the young baronet would be exceedingly ill the next morning; and so he was, for Tom Candlish had a medical sanction for taking a little champagne; and the butler produced the bottle—one of many dozens laid in by Squire Luke, who had purchased them through a friend as a special brand.

It was a special brand of paraffin quality, well doctored with Hambro' spirit; and as, after the first glass, Tom Candlish argued

that the rest would be wasted or drunk by the servants, an opened bottle of the effervescent wine being useless if not utilised at once, he, in spite of the protestations of the butler, finished the bottle, and threw himself back for another week.

At the Rectory, matters had settled down somewhat, the hours gliding by without any discovery being made; and, after the first excitement and dread, Leo began to feel that she would soon be able to resume her meetings with her lover.

North had ceased to call at the Rectory, and they had not yet come face to face. But this troubled Leo less and less. As the days had passed on, and the *éclaircissement* had halted, so had her strength of mind and feeling of defiance increased.

"He dare not face me after his brutal treatment of poor Tom," she had said; "and he knows the contempt in which I hold him. He cannot be so pitiful as to tell Hartley, intimate as he and my brother are. I have nothing to fear."

She feared, though, all the same, though she did not know from whence the stroke she anticipated would fall. Dally was extremely pert, but then she always had been. She could know nothing; and in a defiant spirit, Leo settled herself down in a fool's paradise, eagerly waiting for the recovery of the squire.

The one policeman from King's Hampton had been over and discoursed with the one policeman of Duke's Hampton *re* the sacrilege at the church, and they had taken into their counsel the one policeman stationed at Chidley Beauwells, a village five miles away, but they had made nothing out of that. There was the attack, though, upon the squire, which seemed very promising, and the trio waited upon him as soon as he was pronounced well enough to be seen.

The injury must have had an acerbating effect upon Tom Candlish, for, to use the constables' words, they came down out of the bedroom with fleas in their ears; and after having a horn of ale apiece, went back to the village.

Their way was by the churchyard, where Moredock was sunning himself by leaning over the wall, so that the heat could play well upon his back, and he entered into conversation with the three myrmidons of the law in a questioning spirit.

"Wouldn't give you any information, would he?"

"No," said he of King's Hampton. "Told us to go to——you know."

"No, I don't," said Moredock grimly, as if the allusion to this knowledge at his time of life was unsavoury. "But why wouldn't he tell you? Don't he want who it was caught?"

"Said it was nothing of the kind," said he of Chidley Beauwells.

"Yes," said the Duke's Hampton man; "said it was an accident, old boy—a fall."

"Hi! Yes. I s'pose it would be," said Moredock drily. "Squire had a nasty accident before—a fall. Some people do have accidents of that sort."

"Well," said the Duke's Hampton policeman, "we've done our duty, and that's enough for us."

"Ay," said Moredock. "You've done your dooty, and that's enough for you."

They parted, and Moredock chuckled.

"Bats is nothing and moles is telescopes to 'em. Uniforms seems to make constables blind. Well, all the better for me. Hallo! where's carrier going to-day? Doctor's, p'r'aps, with some new stuff."

The carrier was, however, not going to the doctor's, but passed on.

"Don't quite know what to make of him," muttered Moredock. "That crack o' the head don't seem to have healed up, for he looks queer sometimes. I don't like the look of things, somehow; but we shall see—we shall see. Why don't Dally come down, too? I wanted to know how things is going there, and she ought to ha' got that shirt made by now.

"Hi! hi! hi!" the old man laughed. "Make me two noo best shirts o' fine linen as a man may be proud on. Ill wind as blows nobody any good."

The old man went chuckling away, as he thought over the two new Sunday shirts he

was to have made out of the surplice, which, after unpicking and cutting off edgings, he had washed and dried and handed as so much new material to Dally to make up, long immunity from detection having made him daring enough to trust the linen to the very place that, to an ordinary observer, would have seemed most dangerous.

But the shirts were not made yet, for Dally had declared it to be all bother, and had put the roll of linen in her drawer, inspired by a feeling that gran'fa couldn't live much longer, and then the linen would do for her.

Oddly enough, as Moredock mused upon the whiteness and coolness of the coming undergarments, the carrier stopped at the Rectory gate, and delivered a parcel, carriage paid by North Midland Railway to King's Hampton station, but sixpence to pay for the ten miles by cart.

"Dear me!" said Salis, turning over the package, which was evidently a box done up in very stout brown paper. "'The

Reverend Hartley Salis, Duke's Hampton Rectory, Warwickshire. By N. M. Rail and Thompson, carrier. Carriage paid to King's Hampton.' Well, that's plain enough, Mary."

"Yes, dear; it's evidently for you."

"Yes, evidently for me; eh, Leo?"

"Yes," said Leo, looking up from her book for a moment, and dropping her eyes again without displaying any further interest.

"It's very curious," said Salis, rather excitedly. "'From Irish and Lawn, robe makers, Southampton Street.' Why, surely —bless my soul, I never sent. I——"

He busily cut the string, and opened the paper and the neatly-tied box within, to find, as, after reading the label, he had expected, that the contents consisted of a new surplice of the finest quality with a note pinned thereto, and written within, in a tremulous, disguised hand:

"From an admirer."

The word "admirer" had been lightly scratched across, and "constant attendant" placed above.

Salis looked at the note, and then at his sister Mary, colouring with excitement as ingenuously as a girl.

"Why, Mary," he said, "who could have sent this? Do you know?"

Mary shook her head, but her eyes brightened with pleasure, as she felt how gratified her brother would be.

"Did not you and Leo contrive this as a surprise?"

Mary shook her head again, and Leo looked up languidly.

"What is it?" she said. "A present? No," she added, with a frown, as she saw what it was, and lowered her eyes to her book to read apparently with great interest.

"Then it must be one of North's tricks," cried Salis. "It's very kind and thoughtful of him, but I cannot think of letting him give me such a present as this. Look, Mary, dear. It is his writing disguised, is it not?"

Mary's hand trembled a little as she took the note and glanced at it, to detect the writer at once from a peculiarity which had not been concealed.

"Well," cried Salis, "I am right?"

Mary shook her head again.

"No, Hartley, it is certainly not Mr. North's writing."

"Then, in the name of all that's wonderful, whose is it? The people would not subscribe for it. Besides, it says 'from a constant attendant.' Why, good heavens! it cannot be from——"

Mary glanced at Leo, who was intent upon her reading, and then looked back at her brother, with a half-mischievous and amused smile, as she nodded her head.

"You think so, too," he exclaimed, in a whisper. "Oh!"

There was a look of trouble and perplexity in his face that was intensely droll, for, though no name had been mentioned, both had hit upon the donor; and as the trouble deepened in the curate's face, Mary stretched out her hand to him, and he took it, and sat down by her side.

"It's impossible," he whispered. "I could not think of taking it. How could she be so foolish?"

"It seems cruel to call it foolish," said Mary gently. "The idea was prompted by a very kindly feeling."

"Of course, of course; but, my dear Mary, it is putting me in a false position."

"Not if you treat it as an anonymous gift."

"How can I, when I feel certain that she sent it?"

"But even if you are, I think you might keep it, Hartley. See how common it is for ladies of a congregation to present the curate with slippers or braces."

"Yes," said Salis drily; "and all out of gratitude to their spiritual teacher. Bless 'em, they throw their gifts, and the weak man thinks they are bladders to enable him to float lightly along the social current of air, when, lo! and behold, he finds, poor weak, fluttering butterfly, that one of the fair naturalists has stuck a pin through him, right into the cork, and he is 'set up' for life."

"Nonsense, you vain coxcomb!"

"No, my dear Mary, I am not a vain man;

but I can generally tell which way the wind blows. I have a certain duty to perform in connection with my two sisters—a sort of paternal rôle to play, and consequently I am rather afraid of Mrs. Berens."

"Hartley, dear!"

"Yes, Mary. This surplice is going to be paid for by H. Salis, clerk in holy orders, ill as he can afford to do it, or it is going back to the donor."

"But what can she do with it if your idea is correct?"

"Cut it up to make little garments for the poor children, if she likes. Bother the woman: I wish she would go."

CHAPTER XXI.

DR. NORTH IS STARTLED.

"You puzzle me, doctor," said Moredock; "you do, indeed. I've been a-going to church all my life, and I've listened to hundreds o' sarmons, and I know all about the Good Samaritan and duty towards your neighbour; but how, after what happened, you could tie him up and sticking-plaster him, and then go next mornin' to see how he was, caps me."

"Never mind about that, Moredock," said North quickly, and looking restlessly about the cottage interior. "I think we may feel satisfied he did not revive while he was in the mausoleum."

"Not he. I thought he was never going

to 'vive any more. So you mean to go there again?"

"Yes, Moredock—yes," said North, with his eyes moving wildly round. "I must go on now. I have lost too much time as it is."

"All right, doctor. If you say as we'll go, that's enough."

"You feel convinced that no one has observed us?"

"Yes, I'm convinced, as you call it, of that, doctor. I've kept the secret too well. And so you mean to go again?"

"Go again, man! Yes. Did I not tell you so?" cried North, with an angry excitement in his voice. "Yes, to-night."

"To-night, eh? Very well, doctor. I'll be there; but you'll take a drop o' that cordle with you. There won't be no need for me to watch the vestry to-night."

North made an impatient gesture, and walked to the door as if to go, but turned sharply, and walked back to where the sexton was seated smoking.

"What was it you said?" he asked, in an absent way.

"What did I ask, doctor?"

"Yes, yes, man," cried North impatiently, as he kept glancing towards the door.

"Oh, 'bout that there cordle, doctor. I haven't been quite right since that night, and I thought a drop or two might do me good, and——"

Moredock stopped in the middle of his sentence, and sat staring, for North had suddenly turned and walked straight out of the place.

"Doctor's not got over his tumble that night," muttered the old man. "He's shook, that's what's the matter with him; and he haven't got his thinking tackle quite put right again. It's worried him, too, about that there gel. Well, she won't come to the vestry to-night, and there's no fear o' Squire Tom coming, for he won't be out o' bed, they say, for days. Miss won't want to go and sit there all by herself wi'out she thinks as the doctor would do now. A baggage!—that's what she is—a baggage! and looking all the time so smooth and good. Wonder what parson would say if he knowed of her goings on?"

The old man sat musing and smoking for an hour, and then, by way of preparation for his night work, he let his head go down upon his chest, and sat sleeping in front of his fire for hours.

As the evening wore on, Joe Chegg came sauntering by, and then returned, so as to get a casual glance in at the window. Then he had another, and satisfied at last that the old man was fast asleep, he stood watching him till he saw by the failing fire that the sleeper was about to awaken, when he drew back, and softly and thoughtfully went away.

Just before twelve the old man took his lanthorn, went to the door, and looked out; stood for a while, and then, with an activity not to be expected of one of his years, he walked sharply and silently in the direction of the churchyard, keeping a keen look-out for interlopers. But his walk beneath the glittering stars was uninterrupted, and he made his way silently to the back of the church, looked about him, and, seeing no one, unlocked the iron gate and the mausoleum door, and then turned to wait.

But as he turned, he started, for a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"Why, doctor, I didn't hear you come."

"I was sitting there waiting," said North. "Quick!"

He pressed the door, and looked right into the dark place, where he had not been since Tom Candlish was lifted out and placed by the roadside on the night of the encounter; while now it seemed to the sexton that his companion was beset by a feverish energy and desire to continue his task.

"All right, doctor—all right! Wait till I get a light," grumbled the old man, after he had closed the door. "That's it. There you are. Brought the cordle?"

"Yes."

"You won't want me, and I'm a bit tired and wearied out to-night. Ha, that's it! Good stuff, doctor. Thankye, doctor. Hah—h—h!"

He tossed off the potent dram that was handed to him, and gave back the silver cup, which fitted upon the end of the doctor's

little flask. Then, quite as a matter of habit, he went to the ledge where he had so often sat, and, after muttering for a few minutes, fell off into an easy sleep.

North had stood motionless after lighting his shaded lamp, evidently deep in thought; but a heavy breathing from the corner of the solemn place roused him, and he lifted the lanthorn, crossed to the sleeper, and held the light to his face.

"Asleep!" he muttered, returning to the great stone slab, and setting down the light. "What's that?" he cried sharply; and, starting back, he looked wildly about the place.

"How absurd!" he muttered, after satisfying himself that they were alone. "Want of sleep. My nerves are shaken, and this incessant pain seems too much for me. But I will succeed. She shall see my success, and learn that I am not a man to be cast aside and crushed by her. Yes, I will succeed. It cannot be too late."

He seized the white sheet that covered the subject of his study, but instead of draw-

ing it gently aside, as was his wont, he gave it a sharp snatch, lifted the lamp, and gazed down, thinking of what steps he should take next.

"So many days since," he muttered; "so many days. It cannot be too late. Now to make up for lost time."

He turned up his cuffs, took a small bottle from where it stood upon the slab, and was in the act of removing the stopper, when he uttered a cry of horror, and darted towards the door, dropping the bottle upon the sawdust which covered the stone floor, as he clapped his hands to his face, and then reeled against the wall, to stand clinging to the stone-work of one of the niches.

There was a light there on the stone slab, but it was as nothing to the light which had flashed in, as it were, to his brain; for he had come there that night to finish his task, and it was as though that task were already complete, and that which he had been waiting to achieve was ready to his hand, but in a way which he had never anticipated, and the revelation seemed more than he could bear.

CHAPTER XXII.

SOMETHING COMING ON.

Horace North stood in the old mausoleum for a while, appalled by the thoughts that flooded his soul. The silence was awful. At other times, wrapped up in his pursuit, the presence of the dead had been as nothing to him; the fact that he was surrounded by the grisly relics of generations of the Candlishes had not troubled him in the least. There was a professional air about everything he did, and he watched results with the keen eagerness that a chemist watches his experiments.

But now, all at once, a change seemed to have come over him. He had lost the spur given to him by his love for Leo; but, after

fighting hard with his misery, he had conquered, and forced himself to go on with his task solely in the cause of science, and a strange awakening had been the result.

He had brought all the knowledge he could collect to bear upon his task, and had reached a certain point. Then he had been checked, and the whole of his work had been thrown out of gear; so that now, when he had taken it up again, feverishly determined to carry it on to the end, he found himself face to face with a horror which at first his mind could hardly conceive.

He stood listening, and for a time it seemed that he was alone—that Moredock had been overcome by the dose he had administered; but by degrees his stunned senses took in the fact that the old man was breathing calmly and peacefully, and that he was not alone with the appalling thought which troubled him.

"I ought not to have gone on with it now," he said, at last. "I am mentally and bodily shaken, and unfit to undertake such a task. I'm ready to imagine all manner of

follies—weak as a frightened child. How idiotic to fancy that!"

For the time being his mental strength was *in statu quo*, and, striding forward, he made up his mind to clear away the apparatus of instruments and chemicals, rouse up Moredock to help restore everything to its normal state, and continue his experiment when a fresh opportunity occurred.

He glanced down at the uncovered body, and then, turning to his various preparations, he replaced instruments in cases, bottles in the black bag, and nothing now remained to do but to lay Luke Candlish where he might continue his long sleep with his fathers.

"Poor wretch!" muttered North; "if that miserable interruption had not taken place, you might have been the means of doing more good to posterity than all your predecessors could have achieved had they lived on right until now.

"Yes," he continued, as he made a final examination previous to awakening Moredock, "I had succeeded up to then. Decay

was arrested, and Nature seemed to be working on my side to prove that I was right. Now I must begin again, for it is as if I had done nothing. No, no; the toil has not been thrown away. I have learned more than I think for; I have——"

He shrank back, and looked sharply round, as if puzzled. He turned his gaze upon the sleeping figure before him, and saw only too plainly that the decay he had held at defiance for a time had now definitely set in, and yet how he could not tell, for mentally all seemed misty and obscure. Something seemed to suggest that after all he had arrested the progress of death.

"Pish! What strange fancy is upon me now?" he exclaimed angrily.

But even as he said this in a low whisper, he felt a consciousness that in some manner his work had not been in vain. There before him, surely enough, lay the remains of Luke Candlish, passing back into the elements of which they were composed—ashes to ashes, dust to dust; but the man did not seem to him to be dead. There

was a feeling almost like oppression troubling him and making him feel that he had succeeded—that he had stayed the flight of the hale, strong man, but not wholly; that his work had partially been successful, and that had he continued, a complete triumph would have been the result.

"Absurd!" he muttered, jerking the cloth over the subject of his experiment, and going towards Moredock, but only to spin round, as if he had been arrested by a hand clapped suddenly upon his shoulder.

He stared sharply round the vault again and then laughed aloud.

"How childish!" he exclaimed. "Well, no," he added thoughtfully; "it is a lesson worth learning how, under certain circumstances connected with violence and terrible mental distress, the brain acts as in a case of *delirium tremens*. I was not fit to come here to-night. Better finish, go home, and sleep——and forget," he added softly, "if I can.

"I must be going mad," he exclaimed the next moment; and, making an effort over

himself, he sat down upon the edge of the stone slab to try and think out consistently the mental trouble which kept attacking him.

"It cannot be that," he said, at last. "I am perfectly cool and consistent; I know everything about me. I can go right back through my experiments to the beginning, analyse every thought and feeling, and yet I cannot master this idea."

He sat thinking and gazing at the body by his side, with its form grotesquely marked through the covering sheet.

"It is getting the better of me," he said aloud, "and I must not give way. Lunacy is often the development of one idea, while, in other respects, the patient is *compos mentis*. No, no; a lunatic could not feel as I do. I am too calm and self-contained, and yet here it is. Great Heaven! is it possible that I could have arrested the ethereal, the spiritual, part of this man—have retained his essence here, while the body is going back to decay?"

He stood staring down at the slab from

which he had started, his eyes dilated, and a wild look of horror in his countenance, till once more the teachings of his scientific education combined with the man's strong common-sense to bring calm matter-of-fact reasoning to bear.

"Yes," he said, "it's time I went home to bed; and to-morrow I'll ask old Benson to come over and look after my patients while I go to the seaside and look after myself. I want bodily and mental rest. Here, old chap, wake up!"

Moredock started to his feet and stared at the doctor, for he had been rudely awakened by a heavy slap on the back, while North in turn shrank back and stared at the sexton, as if astounded at what had taken place—an act so foreign to his ordinary way.

"You shouldn't do that, doctor," grumbled the old man, rubbing his shoulder in a testy way. "Works is a bit shaky, and you jar 'em up."

"I—I beg your pardon, Moredock," stammered North confusedly.

"Oh, it don't matter much, doctor, only I was in a beautiful sleep, and dreaming I'd gone to see my Dally as was living in a great house—quite the lady, and the man going to give me a glass o' something when you hit me on the back and woke me. Done?"

"Yes. Help me," said North hastily. "The experiment is at an end."

"Well, I arn't sorry, doctor. I arn't sorry for some things. Hey! but you have been busy clearing up. Quite done, then?"

"Yes, quite done. We'll leave everything as it should be to-night."

"Mornin', you mean, doctor. Well, all right."

The ghastly task was quickly performed, the old man displaying a surprising activity as he replaced the ornamental coffin-lid and screws, after which the place seemed to have resumed its former state.

"No one won't come to see whether the lead coffin's soddered down, eh, doctor?" chuckled the old man, after giving the heavy casket a final thrust with his shoulder to

get it exactly in its place. "They don't do that only when the coroner's set to work, and people think there's been poisoning."

"No, old chap," cried North, slapping the sexton on the shoulder in a jocular way. "Here, have a drop of brandy. After me; I'd rather drink first."

Moredock stared again as the doctor produced a second flask from his pocket, poured some spirit gurgling out into the flattened silver cup, and tossed it off.

"That's good brandy, old man. Stunning. Here you are."

"Doctor's glad he's finished his job," laughed the sexton. "No wonder. I wouldn't ha' been a patticary for no money. Thankye, sir. Hah! that's good stuff. That goes into your finger-ends; but that other stuff's best: goes right to the roots of your hair and into your toes. Rare stuff; good brandy."

"Yes, you old toper," cried North; and then he seemed to drag his hand down just as he was raising it to slap the old man once more upon the shoulder.

"Toper, eh, doctor? No; I like a drop

now and then, just to do a man good. He was a toper—Squire Luke, yonder."

"Yes," said North slowly, as he poured out some more brandy and tossed it off. "The poor fellow used to drink."

"Hi—hi—hi!" chuckled Moredock. "Yes; they say he used to drink, doctor. Job's done, eh?"

He stared hard at the flask, and in so peculiar a manner that North poured out some more.

"Here, have another drop, old chap," he cried; "it'll warm you up."

"Thankye, doctor, thankye. Hah! yes; it's good stuff. Does you good too. Makes you cheery like, and free. Why, doctor, I didn't know you could be so hearty; you keep a man like me a long ways off in general. What's the matter—not well?"

"Eh?" said North, speaking strangely. "I'm not well, Moredock. I'll get out of this stifling place."

"Stifling? Nay, it's not stifling; you only say so because you're done. Here, let me carry the tool bag, as you may say."

The bag was heavy, for packed within it

was the lamp as well as the doctor's bottles, and such instruments as he had not put in his pocket.

"Looks precious queer," muttered the old man, going to and unfastening the door. "Ready, sir?"

North did not answer, but followed the sexton, after a hurried glance round.

"It's all right, sir; nothing left," muttered Moredock, extinguishing the candle in his lanthorn. "Why, any one would think he was growing skeered. Brandy upsets some, and does others good."

The old man closed the massive door of the mausoleum, and locked the gates of the iron railing, and as he did so, North uttered a low sigh full of relief, as if with the shutting up of the grim receptacle certain troublous feelings had been dismissed, and a strange haunting sensation had gone.

"S'pose you'd like me to take the bag on to my place, doctor, and bring it up to the Manor House to-night?"

"Yes, I should," said North hastily; "I'll talk to you then, Moredock. I'll——"

He shuddered, and in place of parting at once from the old man, he kept close to his side, and followed him into his cottage, where he sat down while the old sexton drew the thin curtain over the casement and struck a light.

"Why, doctor," he said, looking wonderingly at the white, scared face before him; "you'd better go home and mix yourself a dose. You've got something coming on."

"Yes," said North, with a ghastly smile; "I'm afraid I have something coming on. No—no! Nonsense! I'm tired. Not quite got over my fall. I shall be better soon."

The old sexton shook his head and went to his locked-up chest, in which, with a good deal of rattling of keys, he deposited the doctor's bag. He was in the act of shutting the heavy lid, when something made him turn to where he had left his companion seated, and he stared in amazement, for the chair was tenantless!

He had not heard North start from his seat and literally rush out of the cottage, as if pursued by some invisible force.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"MY DEAR NORTH!"

"No, sir, he isn't at home," said Mrs. Milt, trying to smile at the curate, but only succeeding in producing two icy wrinkles—one on either side of her lips.

"Some one ill, Mrs. Milt?"

"Well, really, sir, I can't say. Master shut himself in his study last thing—as he will persist in ruining his health and his pocket in lamps and candles—and I went to bed as usual, although mortally in dread of fire, for master is so careless with a light. Then I s'pose some one must have come in the night and fetched him. His breakfast has been waiting hours, and —oh, here he comes!"

For at that moment North came round the end of the house, having entered his garden right at the bottom by the meadow, his dew-wet boots and the dust upon his trousers showing that he must have been walking far.

"Breakfast's quite ready, sir," said Mrs. Milt austerely, as soon as North came within hearing.

"Yes—yes," he said impatiently, as he waved her away. "Ah, Salis! Come in."

"Why, how fagged you look! Who is ill?"

"Ill? Who is ill?" said North wonderingly. "Oh, I see! Well, I am."

"Yes, that's plain enough," said Salis anxiously. "My dear fellow, you are not at all up to the mark."

"Not up to the mark, old chap? Right as the mail! Here, come in, and have some breakfast."

This was said with so much boisterous, coarse jollity, that the curate could not help a wondering look. North saw it, and his countenance assumed a look of intense pain.

"Did you want me?" he said, closing the breakfast-room door, and speaking in a different tone entirely.

"Well, old fellow, I thought I'd run over just to consult you."

"Not ill?" said North, in a voice full of anxiety, but only to supplement it with a sharp, back-handed blow in the chest, and exclaim, in quite a rollicking way: "See! you! I say, you're in tip-top condition!" And then he burst into a hearty roar.

"I don't know about tip-top condition," said Salis tartly, "for I'm not at all well. I'm a good deal bothered, old fellow, about —about some matters; and you'll not mind my coming to see you about things that one would not go to a doctor about, but to a friend."

"I am very, very glad to have you come to me as a friend, Salis," said North earnestly. "Anything I can do I—is it money?"

"Money? Tut—tut! No! When did you ever know me a borrower, man? I beg your pardon, North," he added, beaming

at his friend. "That's just like you—so good and thoughtful; but no, no—no money! Old Polonius was right."

Just then Mrs. Milt entered with the coffee, toast, and a covered dish, a second cup and saucer being on her tray.

"Well, yes; I'll have another cup," said Salis, smiling and nodding; and, directly after, the old friends were seated together opposite to each other, but with North leaving his breakfast untasted, while Salis seemed to enjoy his number two.

"You're not eating, old fellow! I say, you know you're ill. It's my turn now to prescribe."

"Only a little feverish. I have been and had a long walk."

"Ah, that's right. Nature is splendid for that sort of thing."

"Yes," said North quickly. "Now, what can I do for you?"

He winced as he spoke, for he expected to hear something about Leo.

"Well, the fact is, old fellow, you know that my surplice was stolen."

North shrank again, but nodded sharply.

"Well, old fellow, I banteringly said something about the loss being severe to a poor man."

"I—I wish I had known," said North, with a frank smile.

"You mean if you had you would have given me one."

"Yes, that is what I mean," said North.

"And if you had, I'd have cut you, sir, dead! Sure it was not you?"

"Not me?"

"Who sent me a present of a remarkably fine new surplice."

"Certainly not."

"Then it was she."

"I do not understand you."

"Look here! there is only one person who could have sent such a present, and it must be Mrs. Berens."

"Ah, you sly dog! Oh, shame! shame! Ha—ha—ha!" roared North. "The pretty widow—eh? That's pulse-feeling, and putting out the tongue, and how are we this morning! Ha—ha—ha!"

Hartley Salis had a small piece of broiled ham upon his fork, being a man of excellent appetite; and at his friend's first words, uttered in a most singular tone, he let the fork drop with a clatter, pushed his chair a little way back, and stared!

"I—I'm very sorry," faltered North, in a most penitent tone.

"My dear North! Why, what is the matter with you?"

"A little—er—feverish, I think; that is all!"

"One is not used to hear such outbursts from you, old fellow," said Salis; and there was a tinge of annoyance in his tone.

"Pray, pray go on. I—er—hardly know what I said."

Salis drew his chair up again, picked up the fork, raised the piece of brown ham once, set it down, and then took up his cup and sipped the coffee, with his face resuming its unruffled aspect.

"I'm not cross, old fellow—only nettly. It's so unlike you to attempt to—well, to use our old term—chaff me. Besides which,

this thing is a great source of annoyance to me. I feel as if I cannot accept the present —as if it laid me under an obligation to Mrs. Berens; and, really, I should be glad to have your advice. What would you do?"

"What would I do?" cried North, in a coarse, rasping voice. "Why, you know what you want me to say. Get out, you jolly old humbug!"

"Sir!"

"Go along with you! What are you to do with the surplice? Why, wear it, and lend it to old May afterwards when he comes down to marry you and the pretty widow."

"Horace North!" cried the curate indignantly.

"Sit down, and none of your gammon, you transparent old humbug! Why, I can see right through you, just as if you were so much glass."

Salis had pushed back his chair, and now rose, just as North burst out passionately:

"No, no, Salis; don't go—for pity's sake don't go. I have so much to say to you."

"If it is of a piece with what you have already said, Horace North, I would prefer to be ignorant of its import."

The doctor had risen too, and caught the back of his chair, which he stood grasping with spasmodic force, as, suffering an agony he could not have expressed, he saw his friend stalk solemnly along the path to the great gate, which swung after him to and fro for some seconds before the iron latch closed with a loud click.

"Heaven help me!—what shall I do?" groaned North, as he threw himself upon the couch, and covered his face with his hands. "What does this mean? What new horror is this? Have I lost all power over thought and tongue?"

"May I clear away, sir?" said a sharp, clear voice.

North started as if he had been stung, but he did not uncover his face; and he dared not speak, lest words should gush forth for

which he could not hold himself accountable —and to Mrs. Milt!

Under the circumstances, he nodded his head quickly, and lay back with his eyes closed.

"You do too much, sir," said the housekeeper, speaking authoritatively. "You work too hard."

North's irritability was terrible, but he kept it down.

"It's my impression that you're going to be ill," continued Mrs. Milt, as she went on clearing the table.

Strange words seemed to be effervescing in Horace North's breast, and he set his teeth hard, for he felt that if he spoke he should say something which would horrify the old housekeeper and startle himself.

"Well, you can't blame me," cried Mrs. Milt, going out and shutting the door too sharply to be polite.

North was alone, and he rose up with his hands clenched to utter words of wonder as to what his friend would think; but, instead, he burst into a curious fit of laughter and uttered a mocking curse.

The next moment he had sunk back upon his couch with his hands clasped, as he gazed with bent head straight before him between his thick brows, right away into the future, and mentally asking himself what that future was to be.

END OF VOL. II.

CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS, CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.

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3 0112 045832679